

LIFE

JOHAN
BOJER



THIS

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L I F E

COMMENTS ON THE NOVELS OF JOHAN BOJER

THE GREAT HUNGER

"It is the first work of fiction I have ever reviewed; and I come to it with a mind hopelessly untrammelled, and a predisposition of interest in its theme. What is it we are all after in life? Desire to reach, that is the great hunger. The story of Peer Holm is the pilgrimage of a man half-consciously travelling the long road to the Ultima Thule of his soul; passing unsatisfied the goals of knowledge, of power, of love, all the milestones of a full life and coming very late, very broken, but unconquered, to a realization at the last. This book could only have been written by a Scandinavian. It has the stark realistic spirituality characteristic of a race with special depths of darkness to contend with, and its own northern sunlight and beauty. A very deep love of nature colors and freshens the work of this writer, and gives it that—I would not say national, but rather local—atmosphere and flavor which is the background of true art. The translation is exceptionally able, and one would think that but little of the atmosphere has leaked away. The story told, fine and pathetic, is common enough in this world of strenuous endeavor, accomplishment, and decline. Peer Holm, at the lowest ebb of his worldly fortunes, finds satisfaction for his long hunger. A very fine work, both in execution and in meaning."—JOHN GALSWORTHY in the *London Nation*.

THE POWER OF A LIE

"This is a great book. I can have no hesitation whatever in saying that. Rarely in reading a modern novel have I felt so strong a sense of reality and so deep an impression of motive. It would be difficult to praise too highly the power and the reticence of this story. When I compare it with other Norwegian novels, even the best and by the best-known writers, I feel that it transcends them in its high seriousness, and in the almost relentless strength with which its dominant idea is carried through. Its atmosphere is often wonderful, sometimes startling, and its structure is without any fault that has betrayed itself to me.

"It does not surprise me to hear that the Academy of France has lately crowned *THE POWER OF A LIE*, for both its morality and its excellent power are of the kind which at the present moment appeal most strongly to the French mind. The reader will find that this book stirs and touches him, and makes him think."—SIR HALL CAINE.

THE FACE OF THE WORLD

"A big ironic book, finely conceived and very finely executed."—JAMES BRANCH CABELL, in the *New York Sun*.

"A fine book, moist with life, which stands well out of the surrounding banalities. You will be depriving yourself of a rare pleasure if you do not read it."—*The Baltimore Sun*.

TREACHEROUS GROUND

"One of the spring novels which will probably be much read and discussed is Johan Bojer's *TREACHEROUS GROUND*. The Bojer boom began in this country with the publication of *THE GREAT HUNGER*, a rather curious story of Norway related in a caressing monotone. With the publication of *TREACHEROUS GROUND* the estimate of Bojer will, I think, gain a notch or so, and in the parlance of the markets, remain firm. It is the most considerable, the most intelligently conceived, and the smoothest of the three that I have read.

"On the surface it is a slightly pensive recitation of rueful and dramatic happenings. Essentially, though, it is an expert and complete analysis of a moralistic moron. With the scalpel of a deft technique Bojer lays bare the flabby heart, the gelatinous spine, the mushy brain, the feeble viscera of a pietistic coward, the man of easy sentiment, ready martyrdom, and quick remorse, the male who distrusts his instincts, clouds his reason with every sham, relies upon a Pippa Passes and Marxian heaven, and wonders why he fares so ill. And so pleasantly interesting is Bojer in this display of clinical virtuosity that you forget to observe that the cadaver is more than a trifle nauseous. At once a scientific and artistic triumph, combining the art of the prestidigitateur with that of the surgeon.

"It is a fine, ironic story, none the less poignant for its being bitter-sweet."—BURTON RASCOE, in the *Chicago Tribune*.

L I F E

BY

JOHAN BOJER

AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT HUNGER"

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN BY
JESSIE MUIR



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LIFE

I

A FEW days before Easter, Tangen, the artist, met his friend Dr. Holth in the street, and stopped him with a wave of his hand.

“Why, you’re the very person I was thinking about!” he said. “You’re invited to General Bang’s place in the mountains for Easter, and of course you’ll accept with thanks.”

Dr. Holth stood with a bundle of books under his arm. He was a man of about forty, square-built and broad, with a tired face and a dark moustache.

“To the mountains—I? Who’s going to correct my hundreds of exercise-books and give lectures here, there and everywhere? Oh, no, my friend! A father of a family and school-master can’t do quite what a famous artist would do!” He would have passed on, but the other put his hand through his arm and went on with him.

"Now just listen to me, Holth!" he said. "If you were to throw off the bread-winner, schoolmaster and social reformer for a week, you'd see what a different man you'd be when you came back. There'll be moonlight and dancing on the mountains—Weib, Wein und Gesang."

"Don't talk so frivolously to an old man!"

"Don't you know that an Austrian has discovered a preventive of old age? It's called dancing."

Jörgen Holth, when a student, had been tutor at General Bang's when the latter, as colonel, lived in town; and since then he had always been welcome in the hospitable house, though latterly he had become such an active socialist that he felt that he no longer fitted in there.

"Oh, by-the-bye," said the artist, "you weren't made professor this time either."

"Professor! I!" The other laughed scornfully, and quickened his pace. As they went up the palace hill, his tall, slim companion frequently raised his hat to acquaintances. He was a little younger than Holth, but had had

wider experience. A poor country lad, he had been apprenticed to a house-painter, but studied and drew at night. He spent a few stirring years in America, came home full of Yankee confidence, became an artist, rapidly made a name, and one fine day married into one of the best families in the country. His fame was now European; he was a *grand seigneur* when he had money, and a magician in finding ways of obtaining more, always thirsting for new knowledge and new impressions, which he swallowed with the same healthy appetite that he did good dinners and rare wines. He had travelled much and had many successes and many reverses, both of which he took cheerfully, was a sportsman and a social lion, and remained wonderfully young.

"There's a girl going to be there who admires you," he said.

"Oh, indeed! Very likely!"

"She's been a pupil of yours, and her name's Astrid Riis—golden hair and good figure. And there'll be Fru Ramm, a Titian Madonna, and Fru Hiorth—well, you must see her for yourself." And the artist went on to give a list of

the young ladies who were going on this mountain excursion, clicking his tongue at each name. Holth could not help listening, and in reality had the greatest desire to go, not for the sake of the ladies, but because he could scarcely remember when he had last been in the country and had a real rest. The end of it was that after they had gone a good way, Tangen succeeded in wringing from him a promise. "Though goodness only knows how I'm to get away!" he thought, as he tramped on homewards with his books under his arm.

Jörgen Holth was one of those all-round geniuses, who dart about among innumerable things, without actually getting on. He had once meant to be a poet, but as he could not marry on that, he took up social culture, and even took his doctor's degree; but his family had to be provided for, and in the meantime he took to teaching. As years passed and his family increased, his temporary occupation still held him fast. His disappointments had by degrees turned him into an ardent socialist, and lectures and newspaper articles claimed a certain amount of his time. But the same

absence of sunshine and fresh air that prevailed in the schoolroom, the working-men's hall, and his own gloomy flat, now began to characterise his reasoning. When he had tried to become a professor, he put down his failure to the intrigues of evilly-disposed persons; and when he had twice suffered defeat in an election, it was once more persecution. He had now become a pale, shabbily-dressed man, who slept and fared ill and was often fretful.

Easter was late this year, and the snow had disappeared from the neighbourhood of Kristiania, when, on the morning of Maundy Thursday, the crowded train steamed out of the town. When Holth had arrived at the station, it was some time before he succeeded, in all the crush and noise, in finding Tangen. He had gazed at all the holiday-clad people, busily engaged in getting their *skis* registered. Their faces were as pale as his own, but shone with an expectancy that he could not understand.

"Upon my word, I think all Kristiania's going into the country!" he said to the artist as they passed through the waiting-room.

"Why," said Tangen, "are you so entirely

out of everything as not to know of the great change of religion in Norway! The churches are empty at the great festivals, my friend, for the gods of the present day have moved up to the mountains."

They were to travel with the general's eldest son Reidar, a man of about thirty, a merchant and athlete, red-haired, beardless, and with somewhat sleepy eyes. The rest of the party had gone up the day before. The thing now was to find places.

It was a long train that at last moved out in the grey morning light. Holth sat by the window and watched the last houses disappear, and brown fields and dripping trees take their place. But before long, patches of snow began to gleam out here and there, and in a trice they were in the midst of winter. A dusky red sun rose from behind dark hills and lighted up the windows in the scattered dwellings.

"Well, old man!" said Tangen, slapping Holth's knee. "How do you think the community will get on without you? Don't you think it'll be jolly to be a bachelor for a week,

and breathe fresh air in the company of girls?"

Reidar Bang looked satirical. "You poor married men!" he said. "You'll have an account to render when you get home again!"

"He's a misogynist and has read too much Schopenhauer," said Tangen with a pitying glance at Reidar. "But just wait a little! We shall soon have him falling deeply in love."

Reidar raised his light eyebrows and smiled, but said nothing. He knew quite well how busily people were trying to get him to marry. On this occasion his sister Inga had invited a friend of hers, and he quite understood why, but he did not intend to touch her—even with a pair of tongs.

Pipes were lighted and the conversation grew lively, and Holth's spirits began to rise by association with these merry souls. Later in the morning, Reidar proposed that they should leave the train at the halfway station, and go across the mountains. Holth thought it a mad idea. "You must be crazy!" he said. "I haven't had a pair of *skis* on my feet within the memory of man!" Tangen was charmed, however, and all of a sudden, at a station, Reidar

got up, saying, "Here we are!" seized his knapsack, and hurried out. Tangen followed, and to his own surprise, Holth too found himself standing on the platform with a pair of *skis* in his hand, while the train rumbled on again.

"Which way do we go now?"

"Heavenwards," said the artist, pointing to the moor that rose skywards above the wooded hills, covered with newly-fallen snow. Holth sighed and followed the others, at first with his *skis* on his shoulder. It was very still after the noisy town, and the air was so fresh and light, that he stopped involuntarily to drink it in.

The other two seemed to have undergone a transformation. Holth spoke to them, but they did not answer. They hastened on with uplifted head and quivering nostrils, like hounds just loosed. Their bodies seemed greedy for the steep climb, and they hummed to themselves with eagerness and delight. Holth did not relish their company, and would have liked to turn back. People are so different, he thought. Here were these two fops in elegant sporting costume, and himself in a

kind of mixture. When they stopped higher up the hill to put on their *skis*, he looked at their new-fashioned *ski*-fastenings that were attached to the foot with a single movement of the hand; and he himself had to use cord and string. No, he did not shine in such company; he ought to have stayed at home!

“Hurrah!” shouted Reidar out over the valley that now lay far below them. They could still hear the roar of the disappearing train like a far-away rattling among the mountains. “Hurrah!” echoed Tangen, as he raised himself to his full height and swung his arms to fill his lungs with air. “Now we’re off!”

Holth soon proved the truth of this. As a country lad he had been clever enough on *skis*, but today he was soon out of breath. The other two had nothing in their hands; but although he, after the old-fashioned manner, used a long stick, he kept on falling, and had great difficulty in getting upon his feet again. His boots became filled with snow, he got the points of his *skis* in among osiers and lost time in getting free again; he slid backwards in a crack and then fell head foremost in the snow,

and swore angrily when the others went quietly on. "You might wait!" he cried. "We must take breath!" "We must begin first," Tangen called back over his shoulder. Holth looked after them and his lips tightened. Things always go right for some people. Here was this artist, who had grown up in a cottage and had had no schooling, and he was famous. And Reidar, an idler at school, but now head of a large business which he himself had made, interested in everything, from racing to the latest concert. That is how life favours a few people. But he himself—he was always left behind, and would soon be worn out and old.

"I say! You might wait for me!"

He toiled and perspired, and the pulse in his neck hammered so hard against his collar that he had to unfasten the button. The sun melted the snow so that it stuck to the *skis* and made them very heavy. A large bird flew up among the trees with a dash and a shower of snow in its wake; a little farther on a hare darted away. They got higher and higher, zigzagging up the incline, stooping under boughs and being lashed in the face and half-blinded by fir twigs.

A distant sound of church-bells reached them from the valley. Morning service was over. When Holth stood still, he saw on the other side of the valley, hill behind hill in the blue distance, and last of all the white range of mountains, in billows of gold and blue beneath the clear sky.

They were now above the tree-limit, and before them rose the moor like an enormous snow-drift. The other two put on dark spectacles, but Holth had not been so provident, and the snow seemed like a white flame that beat into his eyes. The icy wind up here cut through his perspiring body, and he thought of inflammation of the lungs and death. And now he felt a blister on his heel! He might get blood-poisoning! This would indeed be an Easter!

At last they sighted the cairn, so the worst was over. But now the very land began to play pranks with him. They went on and on, and the confounded cairn was as far off as ever. Here a hidden plain revealed itself, that must first be crossed; and there lay a valley into which they must descend and then

ascend the opposite side, and so on. Holth gazed dully at the labouring back of the artist, and plodded on and on. He would never survive this!

The cairn was a little heap of stones upon bare rock, and when at last they reached it, Holth threw himself down with a groan.

"Are you tired?" asked Tangen, unfastening his *skis*.

"Oh no, not in the least!" he answered crossly.

"Here's an orange," said Bang, taking some out of his knapsack. They peeled and ate this golden fruit that had strayed up into the eternal snow. Holth complained of his sore heel, and Reidar said he should put a plaster on it. "Plaster!" snarled Holth. "Won't you run to the chemist's for one?" But with the sleepiest of expressions Reidar began to remove Holth's *ski* and boot, saying: "Let's have a look at it!" He drew off the stocking, washed the foot with snow, dried it with his pocket-handkerchief, and took out his pocket-book. "Here's some plaster," he said. "A sportsman carries everything with him." Tangen

offered vaseline, and Holth was quite touched. It was very long since he had had comrades like this. If they were indifferent to his weariness they were, at any rate, careful enough about his wound.

When he once more stood up, his foot was all right, and as they glided on in the sunshine, casting long shadows across the dazzling snow, Holth fancied he was not quite so tired. A sense of well-being pervaded his limbs. Ah, he had neglected a powerful frame for many years, but now what had happened? He held up his head and felt inclined to shout out some nonsense, to make the mountains answer and fling it out to the sky. Troubles and reverses seemed to grow small. There would be sure to be some way out of them.

Many miles off, the white horizon rose and fell, assuming fantastical shapes of men and animals. To the north stood two old wives with their heads up in the sky, gossiping on just the same subjects as they had discussed from time immemorial. A fissure in a mountain was a valley containing many villages; and beyond were more mountains and more

fissures. It was Norway. Holth could have described it all in the schoolroom, and yet it now seemed as if he had never seen it before. In town the sky was only a theory, but here it was an actual thing. It glowed in the south, it flickered in the west. The *skis* glided of themselves; the feet moved, but only to yield, not to work. It was like a voluptuous dance across a floor bounded by infinity itself, beneath a dome whose height none had measured. The mind is filled with rhythm, and one looks about smiling.

"Oh, look there!" cried Bang suddenly, as a flock of white birds rose up and flew quickly away through the blue air. "Ptarmigan!" said Tangen. "Mountain ptarmigan!" said Reidar, his sleepy face becoming wide awake. "I must see how many there were." And he set off after them, bending forward and swinging his arms, his yellow *skis* looking like flames upon the white snow. He went at such a pace that he had soon dwindled into a speck far away.

"That's a fellow with lungs and muscles!"

said Tangen. "Come on! He'll catch us up."

"Has he really never been engaged?" asked Holth, who now, being in good spirits, was ready to talk about women.

"He shuns girls, my friend, because he has dreamt that one is going to ruin him. Would you believe that that iron frame is the abode of mysticism? In May last year he dreamt that on the 14th of January this year he was to telegraph such and such a message to his agent in Odessa, about a large grain speculation, and he did it and made thousands over it. He is a fatalist and muses upon death, and at the same time plays tennis and ruins his rivals in business. Oh, he'll get on!"

"There he is again!" And the black speck grew rapidly out of the snowy sheet, then he shouted, and a moment later dashed up to them. "There were at least fifty," he said, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"And all that exertion only to find out that!" thought Holth.

The plateau now began to slope down to the next valley, and the pace became quicker.

Tangen went as if on skates, and Reidar in frolicsome bounds from sheer exuberance of spirits. Holth had to lean on his stick, expecting every minute that he would fall. The wind whistled past his ears and cut through him; his eyes watered and the snow seemed like a fabric running up to and past him. Soon a dark line was visible below. It was the tree-limit once more. In a little while they had glided down on to a frozen lake, and suddenly heard a shout.

"They've come to meet us," said Reidar; and soon after they saw on the farther shore two *ski*-ers, a man and a woman. Before them lay the white, undisturbed surface of the lake, which now, from both sides, became scored with long *ski*-tracks. In the advancing couple Reidar recognised his youngest sister Inga, and Tangen his brother Henrik. "The rogue knows jolly well what he's about," he said.

The last time Tangen had seen the young girl, she was in ball-dress, and now she wore a short frieze dress, with embroidered belt and a red woollen cap upon her dark hair.

On her feet she wore great thick boots, out of the tops of which stuck goat's-hair socks. And yet she glided towards them as easily and freely as if she had neved moved upon anything but *skis*.

"You've frightened us nearly out of our lives," she said, a little breathlessly, as she pushed back a wave of dark hair from her rosy face. "The boy came home from the station with an empty sleigh and not so much as a telegram even." And she smiled, disclosing gleaming white teeth.

"It looks as if you two had guessed which way we should come, however," said Reidar, chucking her under the chin. "Or had you and Henrik thought of running away?"

Inga gave her companion a sidelong glance, and the young man pulled his fair moustache and laughed.

Soon the whole party were on their way to the wood, where there was more shelter than on the plateau.

"I say, old man," said Tangen to his brother, "who gave you leave to go about alone with Fröken Bang?"

They smiled at one another, these two brothers, whose mother had been a servant-maid. They had been brought up separately, at the expense of the parish; but when Henrik was only just past the confirmation-age, the elder brother had established a position for himself, and was able to help the younger. The young architect had recently returned from a residence of some years in Paris, full of plans for creating something new at home.

The incline now became steep. Reidar drew his cap down over his ears and disappeared in a cloud of snow brushed from branches and bushes as he sped past. Inga followed him with her hands in her pockets. At one moment it looked as if a branch would cut her in two, but she stooped in time; at another as if she would fall over a tree-stump, but she turned aside and disappeared, her hands in her pockets all the time. Holth came last, and for him the descent was dangerous and full of knocks and falls, cuts and scratches. When at last he reached the general's place, with its little red houses on the hill, his ears were full of snow, and his face burning after

his numerous falls. In the yard there was a little forest of *skis* stuck into the snow; and the white-haired wife of the general was standing on a balcony, waving her hand to the newcomers.

“We must have a bucketful of cold water thrown over us to prevent our catching cold,” said Reidar, leading Holth into a little bath-house. It was no use making objections. He had to undress; but he nearly fainted with the shock of the cold water. After a good rub down, however, and a change of clothes from his knapsack, he followed the others through the snow over to the main building, with a sense of well-being that made him feel many years younger.

II

IF any one had asked General Bang whether he was a happy man, he would have answered with a careless wave of the hand. Happiness or unhappiness—as if he had time to ponder over such things! When inspecting, he used to come down like a whirlwind, and fill the drill-ground with a mixture of fear, bustle and festive pleasure. Then suddenly one day he reached the age-limit, to his intense bewilderment. What! Was he, who still had so much to do—was he old? Had it come to an end? There was scarcely one silver thread in his dark beard, and his thick-set frame was as elastic as ever. Was he nearly seventy—he?

It was hard to go about with nothing to do when his friends set off for the drill-ground, and the atmosphere of his pretty house in Drammens Road was oppressive as he wandered restlessly from room to room. It had formerly been a recreation for him

to play the violin, but now it only reminded him of idleness. It was better when the shooting began, and before it came to an end he was fortunate enough to have found mistakes in the province maps which, of course, must be corrected, even if he had to do it himself. Or he discovered regions in which a sanatorium should be built; or he went into sæters and found things that might be improved if only people had their eyes open. He wandered in forest and mountain, always restless, as if he were afraid of something unpleasant happening to him; indeed, he became so busy again in one good cause or another, that he once more found it a rest to play the violin. He old!

But when, in his wanderings, he sat with his chin resting upon his stick, looking out over forest and moor, memories of the past came back to him. How many of his friends were dead! Ah yes, but some were still living. And then there were the women. Well, who is there that can say he has never been to blame? There was that time with Captain Riis. They were rivals in the military acad-

emy, and there Riis was the fortunate one. Later they were captains on the same drill-ground, and were rivals there too; but when Bang, as major, galloped along the line, Riis was passed over and left behind. One fine day Bang galloped along the same line as general, while Riis still stood, a grey-haired captain, who had to lower his sword to salute his superior officer. There are ups and downs. And it was summer, with light nights, and Riis, who had married late in life, was visited in camp by his pretty young wife. . . . But there, he must be going on if he is to get home in time for supper.

Years had passed, and the previous winter Inga came home and spoke about a friend of hers in the gymnastic class, Astrid Riis. Oh yes, she was the daughter of a retired captain. Inga obtained leave to invite her to the Easter outing, but when the general saw the young girl enter the railway-carriage, he started in astonishment. That fresh face under the golden hair! Why, it was Fru Riis herself! "Is it really fifteen years since your mother died, Fröken Riis? Indeed!"

It was only a little episode, that time long ago, and since then he had been busy about so many things, but that night he had strange dreams. The next morning, even before he had quite finished dressing, Inga came into his room and said: "Is it true that you're going to call on Astrid's father when you go back to town?" "Why, yes! He's an old comrade of mine." "But you mustn't, father!" "Eh, what! Mustn't I?" Inga looked guilty. "No," she said, "because—because Astrid didn't dare tell him that—that it was to us she was coming." The general stood open-mouthed. "Father, what was there between Captain Riis and you?" "Doesn't her father know where she——?" "No; but as she keeps house for him and works besides, half the day, in an office, don't you think she deserves a little holiday?" "Jesuit!" said the general, shaking his head. "Besides, he's quite certain never to hear of it, because he never sees anybody." "Doesn't he?" said the general, turning to the window. "Does he never see anybody?"

General Bang was always busy up in the

mountains too. He would himself sweep paths in the snow to all the little outhouses; he would bring in the firewood with his own hands; he had his favorite view from one particular window to which he had continually to go; there were visitors and he had much to see to. But today, through it all ran the thought: "So, Captain Riis, you've shut yourself up, have you, and people are deceiving you now too!"

The new guests arrived, and the fire in the high-raftered room shone upon a noisy assembly. There were the children of the house, the sons-in-law, and some friends. There was the eldest son, a forest-inspector, a perfect giant, with brown beard and kind eyes. There was Hjort, a business manager, and his pretty young wife, with whom Tangen was already carrying on a low-toned conversation; and the general was walking about the room with a daughter on each arm, one dark, Fru Ramm, the other fair, Fru Heiberg. In front of the fire sat the youngest son, Harald, an engineer, and when in town a dandy, but here collarless and wearing patched trousers and a coarse

woollen jersey, and thankful that he was a sportsman. He admired his brother Reidar for his triumphs in sport and good strokes of business; and he dreamed of beating him in both lines.

"Confounded humbug the whole of it!" came from the open door, as the two sons-in-law made their appearance—the young beardless Captain Ramm, and Dr. Heiberg, a plump man with gold-rimmed eyeglasses.

"Most of it's humbug," said the captain, as he shut the door. "I'm certain that next year the Storthing——"

"For goodness' sake, don't let us have any Storthing talk up here, where we meant to breathe pure air!"

The walls of the great room were adorned with elks' heads, hunting implements, and hangings woven by the daughters of the house; and the chairs hollowed out of trunks of trees were so big that one could almost have lain down in them.

"But we ought really to have dinner now," said the active little hostess. "You who've come over the mountains must be fearfully

hungry!" Her small face was rosy under her white hair, and her whole person spotlessly clean, and her brown eyes twinkled roguishly. "Oh, by the by, Holth, you haven't told me anything about your wife and children yet," she went on, taking Holth's hand in both hers and drawing him aside.

Just then the door opened, and a bent, white-haired old lady entered with a stick in her hand. Cries of "Grandmother! Grandmother!" greeted her on all sides. It was difficult to believe that Fru Bang, who had long been a grandmother herself, had brought her mother with her up into the mountains. The old lady's name was Fru Kindt, and she used to say jokingly that she did not remember whether she was eighty or ninety.

"Ah, there's the bad man who never comes to see us now," she said, making her way towards Holth.

When at last dinner was ready, they had to go out to another little building that stood by itself up among the trees. The path up to it through the snow had become so soft in the sun that they sank ankle-deep in it. This

caused some fun. Some of them found in the kitchen big straw slippers which they put on; the tall forester trusted to his own legs and took his wife upon his back; and the general and Reidar carried the old lady in a dandy-chair, although she screamed like a young girl. Tangen was most unlucky, for as he lifted Fru Hiorth in one arm and set off, he tripped and fell headlong, so that the lady was flung far off into the snow, and before he could come to her assistance, another rescue-party had been sent out to bring her ashore. Laughing and shouting they came into the little raftered room, where they were met by the warmth from another fire and the smell from steaming saucepans.

It seemed to Holth that no food had ever tasted so good as this—with a truly primeval appetite after his exertions on the mountains and the cold shower, and with the sunlight falling across the floor. And tomorrow too he would be free! The hot meat was pleasant to his palate; there was no wine, but he held up his glass of clear, bright water, and let it sparkle in the sun.

The conversation became general, as at a festive dinner, faces were merry and flushed with the cold, lips smiled and eyes sparkled.

Holth was placed beside the old lady, who now turned to him to say: "You can't think how different young people are now from what they were in my time."

"I can quite believe it," he replied.

"No longer ago than when the general was a young lieutenant and was courting my daughter, he would come with some fellow-officers and serenade her; while now—now they invite one another to tennis and *ski*-excursions." And the old lady closed her eyes, as if to recall memories of bygone days.

Suddenly Dr. Heiberg held up a piece of stuff in one hand, and every one looked at it. "I found this in the wood," he said, stroking his beard. "Some *ski*-er must have torn his trousers upon a branch in passing; but I wonder whether it was a man."

The ladies cried out in chorus, and Fru Ramm leaned across the table and snatched the piece of stuff from him. "Oh, was it yours, Anna?" he said, going on with his din-

ner. "Be quiet!" she cried, blushing and looking across at Tangen. "Your wife ought to look after your manners a little, for you're getting worse and worse."

"Do you think I don't try?" said her fair sister, who sat near her. "But he can wait now until we've finished dinner."

The great, steaming dishes of meat were rapidly emptied. Inga often rose from the table to help with the waiting, and it was easy to see from her important air that she was the youngest daughter of the house. Very soon Astrid Riis was allowed to help her, and the two young girls became quite maternal in their care, as they passed backwards and forwards across the broad stream of sunshine on the floor, Inga dark and slender, Astrid with her golden hair shining in the sun, and both with the free, easy carriage that gymnastics and dancing give.

The general followed Astrid's movements with little side-glances. "How can you have managed to keep your father in ignorance as to where you are?" he thought. How like her mother she was!

For the young girl too, to be a guest—here—was like a strange dream. She had always heard from her father that the general was a monster of iniquity, and she had come here with Inga out of a rash desire to venture close up to him. And there he sat, smiling and looking kind and nice, and she was waiting on him. How strange! If her father were to know! But there was something so foolhardy about it, too, that a thrill ran down her spine, and she bent her head to hide the smile that came to her lips.

The hum of conversation continued until all turned their attention to Tangen, who was saying that culture had its origin in beautiful women.

“When I stand and look down upon Rome or Paris,” he said, “I think of all the women who must have shed tears in order that all those beautiful buildings, gardens, parks, monuments and fountains could be produced.”

“Tears?” questioned several voices.

“A beautiful woman has no soul until her

heart is broken, so of course she cannot inspire when she smiles."

"Just listen to him!"

"Then it's one of the aims of culture to break women's hearts," said the general, smiling.

Tangen was seated beside Fru Hiorth, and the pleasure of it made him almost arrogant. It is true he loved his wife, and at parting had sworn that he would think of her all the time; but it was not easy to be he. He had had no opportunity of being young until lately, and now he had so much appetite saved up. Then he met one woman who made him feel like a youth of twenty, and then he met another who surpassed all others. There was so much that was beautiful in the world, and at the present moment it was Fru Hiorth and no other.

She was the daughter of a priest, and was only two or three and twenty. Her oval face, framed by waving brown hair, had acquired an olive tinge up here; and her dark, arched eyebrows, her teeth, her lips, the whole fresh,

"I was ejected, ladies and gentlemen, because I said I would make a slave of my wife." And in his cap and apron he went on down to the other house, followed by peals of laughter.

The sun was just sinking behind the daz-
zingly white ridge in the west, and great red
clouds glowed like flames over half the sky.
What the sun had melted earlier was now
frozen again, and the hill to the north of the
houses was soon alive with dark figures, swing-
ing arms, and *ski*-points shooting incessantly
past one another. The snow sighed beneath
the big forester, who drew his wife by the
hand. Hiorth kept fast hold of his too, think-
ing, as he glanced at Tangen, that it was best
to make sure of what one had. They all gath-
ered upon the hill, and looked down into the
blue shadows of the valley. The pace would
be pretty fast, and for a moment no one
seemed to be inclined to be the first to try it.

Inga and Astrid had finished washing-up,
and now came up too on their *skis*.

"Do you dare?" said Henrik, raising his
hand to Inga.

“Catch me if you can!” she answered with a little grimace, and dashed off. For a moment there was the swish of a single pair of *skis*, and then the young man darted after her, but outside her tracks, so as not to run into her if she fell. What a pace they went at! The air was like ice against face and chest. He saw her a dark figure that kept sinking before him. She had her hands in her jacket-pockets even now, as she came upon a drift and was carried up into the air, bending to take the descent, on again with hair loosened and flying in the wind like a kite. Now she shot up and over the road and he after, though he all but fell. She, in front, broke into a laugh and bending to the right, swung round with a swish up the hill again to stop herself. Then she took her hands out of her pockets and looked round. He dashed up beside her out of breath with the race and the excitement of it, and caught hold of her hand, crying: “You said I was to catch you.”

“Yes, but see if you can keep me!” And she was off again up the hill.

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"I was so afraid you'd fall," he said, trying to keep up with her.

"Oh, rubbish! It was yourself you were afraid for."

"Oh, I say!"

"I'm certain that if I broke my neck, you'd be off at once to the next girl."

"What?" At this he really had to come up with her.

"Look! Is that Orion?" she said, pointing with her gloved hand; but no sooner had he turned to look at the yellow constellation than she suddenly disappeared, leaving him standing moodily where she left him.

Hiorth had after all let go of his wife, and Tangen, as he glided past her, seized her hand and drew her with him until they had gone too far to turn.

"Oh, don't! I shall fall!" she cried.

"All the better!" he answered quickly. "I know nothing so delightful as to fall with a beautiful woman!" And they dashed on.

"You mustn't let go of me, Tangen!"

"Not even in death!"

The wind carried away his cap. At the

dizzy pace at which they moved, they might very possibly fall with their heads against a disguised rock, or break their limbs, and they kept a convulsive hold of one another's hands, as if to face a common fate; but she felt that he stood firmly on his feet, and it gave her a sense of security; she trusted herself to him in a voluptuous terror of what the next moment might bring. They came upon a drift, and together leaped into the air, then on again like two flashes of lightning. Suddenly he shot up over a mound of snow that she escaped; he felt a jerk to his hand and lost his balance, and the next moment there arose clouds of snow in which two figures and two pairs of *skis* were being whirled along.

When at last they came to a standstill, they lay motionless for a few moments to collect their scattered senses. Even when they had risen to their feet again, they stood gazing at one another for an instant, as if in wonder at being there together. Finally, they discovered that neither their *skis* nor their limbs were broken, so there was no reason to do anything but laugh as, still half dazed, they

helped one another to get the snow out of collars and ears. In the fall her elbow had struck his face, and as his nose now began to bleed, she seized a handful of snow and pressed it to his forehead.

"Oh, dear, was it my fault?"

"Yes, you've shed my blood, so beware—I may require something of you in return."

"Blood?"

"No," he said; "something else. But not now."

Here Hiorth came flying up to them with an angry look on his face. "Herr Tangen!" he cried, leaning heavily on his staff as a brake. "Herr Tangen, what is the meaning of this? I must say——" But the next moment he fell head foremost over a ridge of drifted snow, and disappeared in smoke and vapour.

"What were you about to say?" asked Tangen, when the other had risen and was able to breathe again. "I thought you wanted to say something."

"Go to the devil!" cried Hiorth, still spitting snow out of his mouth.

"Oh, very well, then we'll go," said Tangen, taking the girl's hand. She looked for a moment at her husband. "You didn't hurt yourself, did you, Hans?" "No, indeed!" he answered, taking the snow out of his hair. In his own opinion his life had been in danger when he fell, and for the moment that overshadowed everything else. The girl went up with Tangen; the men slept in a room by themselves, so her husband would not get properly hold of her until Easter was over.

Captain Ramm wanted to take his wife with him down the hill, but she shook her head and kept her eyes upon the two who had just fallen together. "No, I tell you!" she said. "I ought never to put on *skis* again. I'm too old." And her breast seemed to heave with some secret sorrow.

"Old! What nonsense! But do you see, Anna, most of these *ski*-ers have been my pupils in gymnastics. Do you see how well they do it?"

She was not listening to him, and now, as Tangen and Fru Hiorth drew near, she suddenly started down the hill alone.

Reidar and young Harald were busy piling up snow for a leap. Harald was a little envious of his elder brother, who had scored so many successes in sport. But wait a little!

"It's about high enough now," said Reidar, standing up beside the great mound of snow. It was about his own height. "Well, we aren't exactly children, are we?" said his brother, quickly tossing up a few more shovelfuls.

"Why, that jump will be almost like the Holmenkol one," said Astrid Riis, as she glided past.

Reidar raised his cap and bowed stiffly. "Yes, Fröken Riis; and who would have expected it—of us?"

She pushed on with head bent and lips compressed. Arrogant creature! He'd better take care!

"Come here and look!" was the cry. "Reidar's going to take the leap!"

As Reidar quietly zigzagged up towards the wood to get a run, a grey-haired *ski-er*

came towards him with his cap in his hand and holding out a telegram.

“Are you Herr Reidar Bang?”

Reidar took the telegram and read: “Your mill destroyed last night by fire, with grain, flour and machinery. What is to be done?” Reidar looked thoughtful for a moment. Well, the mill was, of course, insured, but the year’s production and profits were lost, and this amounted to several thousand kroner. The next moment he wrote, with his most sleepy expression, an answer on the back of the same form, and giving the messenger five kroner, told him to go into the kitchen and get a cup of coffee, and then hurry off and despatch the telegram. He then went quietly on up the hill to take the jump. “What was that?” cried his brother after him. “Nothing,” he answered, and soon disappeared. Before long a shout was heard: “Here he comes!” Harald was standing beside the mound to show whereabouts it was. The next moment a dark figure shot out from among the trees, bending his knees a little as he approached the mound, like a spring gathering force, then

flew past Harald and up into the air. A strip of red sky and blue mountain was visible below his *skis*, as he sailed up there in the twilight with arms outstretched like the wings of a bird. It looked as if the attraction of gravitation was suspended, and the man belonged to the air. He began to sink, but the hillside beneath him sank also, and when he finally came to the ground, he still dashed on in a cloud of snow.

Harald was already up in the wood to do what his brother had done, and when he flew out from the mound and hovered in the air with outstretched arms, he proudly cried "Hurrah!" Even when he descended and continued his course in a cloud of snow, in danger of falling every moment, he cheered again. Now they could see!

A little later, as the two brothers passed Astrid Riis, she exclaimed enthusiastically: "How splendidly you took the jump, Herr Harald! I've never seen any one do it with such ease!"

"And what about my brother?" asked the young man, with sparkling eyes.

“Ah, yes,” she said demurely, “he did try it, too, didn’t he?” Raidar stared vacantly at the spiteful girl, but as he glided on he could not help laughing. Her simple attempt to tease him was quite touching.

A round moon had risen over the hills in the east—not the cold metallic disc of winter, but the dazzling silver lamp of April. The hillside was soon alive with a noisy crowd, flying down with merry cries, standing or falling, struggling up again and flying on covered with snow, returning with shouts and laughter, each breath sent out like a little white cloud in the cold air, and faces ruddy with warmth.

Holth was in a strange mood as he stood at the top of the hill looking on. He had not the courage to go down, and he felt he was old and not wanted. When had he been so young? Not when he was twenty, for then he had had to toil for his daily bread by day and study by night. Then he must have been young afterwards, when he swore to some items on an elections programme, and cried “Hurrah!” for the right councillor? Or

later? Marriage—a heavy family load to drag—where was his youth?

“Why are you standing here alone?” said Astrid Riis, as she came up to him, a little out of breath with the hill.

“Don’t trouble about me, Fröken Riis. You look much nicer when you fly along alone.”

“Come down with me!”

Astrid, like the others in her class, had been an enthusiastic admirer of Holth in his art-history lessons, and now it was most interesting to be able to help him to *ski*. “That’s capital!” she cried, as they set off obliquely down the hill, so as to reduce the pace. “Yes, when you’ve youth with you!” he answered, more than a little anxious.

On the way back he took her hand, which was warm although she had taken off her woollen glove. She let him keep it as they went on, and for a moment he felt almost giddy and confused with a new, unknown happiness. But suddenly he seemed to see a worn woman and children of various ages at home, a gloomy flat, debt, a hopeless fu-

ture; and involuntarily he dropped the girl's hand, and went on with bent head.

Henrik Tangen was struggling up alone, rubbing his forehead with snow. There was a little girl he had his eye upon; but he might just as well try to catch a fish with his hands. She was here, there, and everywhere. She flew off hand in hand with the doctor, with her sister, or with one of her brothers; and when he approached her, she was off again asking some one else to go with her. "I ought not to have come here," he thought. "I shall never be happy again." And he turned and looked gravely at the moon.

His brother had another little run with Fru Hiorth, and when they were alone for a moment at the edge of the wood, he stopped and looked into her face.

"Forgive me for being quite drunk this evening. Is it you, or the moon, or the country, or only that I'm alive, that makes me lose command over myself? Do you know what happiness is? I know too what adversity is; but this evening—this evening——"

And he suddenly threw himself back into the snow and lay there with outstretched arms.

"No, stand still like that, so that I can see your head arched over by the sky. Some day we shall die, and then others will play some evening as we are doing. But we are still alive, and we are still young.

And I call Thee to witness, Eternal God,
That the life that Thou gav'st me is lovely."

"Hush, Tangen!" said the girl, looking about her. "Get up! Some one might see us!"

"No, I mean to kiss you. Don't be afraid—only your shoe, only the edge of your dress." And before she could prevent him, he had taken hold of her foot, and kissed the thick boot, kissed the icy hem of her skirt, trembling with pleasure as though it had been her face.

"No, no, Tangen! Let me go! Let me go, do you hear?" And she tore herself away and went on, but slowly, and soon stood still and waited for him.

A gong was heard, calling to supper.

Henrik Tangen had at last got hold of Inga, and the two came up to the house after the others had gone in. All the way up he had talked enthusiastically about his ideas for new buildings here at home, but she listened to him with an ironic smile. He must not become too vain. Up at the house he knelt down in the snow and unfastened her *ski*-straps, and as she felt with a slight tremor his fingers about her feet, she gazed full at the moon with shining eyes. With his bare hand he carefully brushed the snow from her shoes and stockings. "Thank you," she said. "There, that'll do! That'll do, I say!"

The party at the supper-table was a noisy one, and faces and hands glowed with the cold and the heat; but the whole outing was only an incitement to further exercise.

III

LIFE on the mountains brings people into a state of innocence, and they become children again. In a dance no woman sits out because she is plain, no man excuses himself with inability to dance, no one makes spiteful remarks in corners about others' dresses, for no one "dresses," and all are alike.

The walls in the large hall were so dark that neither the fire nor the lamps hanging from the roof could make it very light, and the couples whirled about in a ruddy half-light. There was a noise of sturdy feet, for the dancing shoes were leather boots with inch-thick soles. The room grew warm, and the men discarded their coats and danced on in their shirt-sleeves; they were on the mountains. The general had been forbidden to dance, but how could he remember a little heart-trouble at such a time! Never mind; we all have to die.

During a pause he went up to Holth, who

stood wiping his forehead after his exertions.

"Well, monsieur!" he said, slapping him upon the shoulder. "What do you like best at the present moment—dancing or socialism?"

"I dance so badly, general. It must be the fault of socialism."

"Then you can revenge yourself upon all your 'isms and learn a proper waltz."

"It's too late now."

"Nonsense! Why, I, a man of seventy, went to a new dancing class last year to learn the Merry Widow waltz, and it's made me younger by twenty years. No, a composer who flings out upon the world a melody so bewitching that even the blind and the lame must get up and waltz, he does far more good to mankind than either kings or trade unions. What do you say? Write a treatise on that, young man!"

"Young, yes—young!" said Holth with a melancholy smile.

"Well, is it impossible for you to be more than twenty in the presence of such girls?" The general stroked his handsome beard, and

looked at the dancers with warmth in his gaze. "In olden days a young girl had to sit stooping over embroidery, but look there. Those girls aren't crooked and thin and ready to faint with a little movement, are they? When the next generation comes, born of such mothers, we shall become a nation to conquer the world. But listen! That's a new one!" And the old beau was off in search of a partner.

"You're not dancing. May I have the honour?" said Astrid Riis to Holth; and he swung off with her to the softly swaying music, a little uncertain in his time, but aided by her once more. Her waist was so firm to his arm, and her movements so sure; he felt the light touch of her hair against his face, and her breath upon his neck. Oh, how good it could sometimes be to be alive!

Paul Tangen, the artist, was never more at his ease than when dancing with a young woman. His supple body seemed to turn to music, and his face, with the brown beard and thick fair hair, seemed to be dreaming with closed eyes. And yet there was something tragic about those features, which could

not conceal their forty years, with marks of toil and trouble, but with the blind joy of a youth.

He was now dancing with Fru Ramm, and said softly into her ear: "You wouldn't go with me on *ski*."

A shadow crossed her face, which was half turned up towards him, and her mouth hardened a little.

"No," she said, gathering up her dress. "It was my fault perhaps."

In a little while he whispered: "Two years ago—up here—do you remember?"

She closed her eyes, and after a few rhythmical movements, the answer came under her breath: "No, I remember nothing."

A few minutes later, when she saw him dancing with Fru Hiorth—in the same manner—she rose, said good-night, and went to bed.

Then the door opened, and the oldest member of the family appeared, smiling, with her stick in her hand. She was greeted with cries of "Grandmother, grandmother! We thought you were asleep."

"Oh, indeed! Do you think any one can sleep in a house like this? But I should rather like a dance myself."

The applause was great; but when the general came up and bowed to her, she refused. "It would have to be Reidar, if I do," she said, "for he knows how." Reidar, however, had to put on his jacket before he was allowed to present himself, for she was not accustomed, she said, to dance with gentlemen in undress.

They danced, of course, only a few turns, and then the old lady had to be assisted to a seat, whereupon she declared her intention of remaining where she was and looking on until it was all over.

The best part was still to come, when the young people of the house began to dance folk-dances. Harald Bang climbed up with a concertina on to a ladder that leant against the wall, and Reidar led Inga out into the middle of the great floor, while all the others sat round the walls to look on. A new culture was played into their minds; the languishing waltz tones gave place to concertina

airs reminiscent of quiet valleys and far-off times.

Reidar, strong and supple, was in a moment transformed from a gentleman to a peasant, and with raising of shoulders and arms, and flinging of legs, he led his sister by the hand, in little jumps, round the floor. His mill was burnt down, he had suffered great loss, but no one knew it; in short, he was going to dance a "springdans." He flung the young girl's hand over his head and then again and again over hers, he crouched, he stamped on the floor and cried: "Hey!" Then there was a kind of private business between them, as they stamped round with short steps, side by side and hand in hand; but at last it became too much for him, and he seized her round the waist with both hands and whirled her off, their bodies alternately rising and falling. Her hair became unfastened and flew out behind in a plait; and her skirts filled the floor with wind. Hey! The peasant lad released the girl, spat on his hands, stamped on the floor and would not hear of any interference. Hey! Now he

seized her again, whirling along, lifted her from the floor in a high arch again and again, released her, clapped his hands—hey!—and whirled her off once more.

“That’ll do, that’ll do!” cried their mother. “Inga will be quite out of breath. No more now!”

“Come and take the concertina, Reidar,” said Harald from the ladder, “and then we can have a ‘halling.’” For he, too, was desirous of showing himself off upon the floor.

The general considered, however, that a “halling” upon a concertina was nothing short of desecration, so he fetched his violin and mounted the ladder himself. Harald threw off his jersey, stepped out into the middle of the floor, and was a peasant lad from top to toe. He swung his arms and spat on his hands, crying: “Does any one dare?”

Reidar said he had danced so much he was going to have a pipe.

“You must be quite tired out,” said Astrid Riis quietly. Reidar glanced carelessly at her and calmly took out his pipe. How that girl kept on at him with her little sarcastic

remarks. She was by no means the languishing girl that he had thought her, with matrimony for her one aim. He really felt that he would like to dance with her now.

"Where is my wife?" said Hiorth, going round and peering with shortsighted eyes into all the corners. But she was not in the room, nor was Paul Tangen either.

"Well, if no one dares, that alters the case," said Harald, spitting scornfully far over the floor. What a country lad that Carl Johan Street dandy had become. "Will nobody venture?"

At this, Henrik Tangen quietly divested himself of his coat and stepped out. He was slim and elastic, but now tried to make himself clumsy and broad.

The violin began a frolicsome, defiant "hall-ing," and an involuntary tremor passed through the assembled party. Even in these town-dwellers, the rousing sounds of the fiddle conjured up thoughts of strong men, of drinking, stabbing and blood.

The two in the middle of the floor stood for a moment smiling at one another, but the

music soon transformed their faces, which darkened with excitement. Their shoulders and feet began to move, they advanced with clenched fists, they retreated as if to gather strength, but their eyes darted lightning, and their mouths grew hard. The fiddle excited and egged them on. Hey! They looked askance at one another, but for a moment their bodies expressed indifference. Pooh! What was there to mind! The fiddle laughed and jeered, and their feet moved more rapidly and their elbows shook at their sides. Harald spat upon the floor and said any one who liked could take it up, and his rival came up to ask what he meant by that. Only that any one might come on; he was a full-grown man! Their legs danced until there was hardly room on the floor, and their faces stood at storm. The spectators sat and laughed, for Henrik Tangen was so entirely the old-time peasant that he felt for his sheath-knife at his back, and turned the quid in his mouth. Their movements became wilder and wilder, and the fiddle filled the room with rage. Suddenly Harald sprang up on to a

bench and danced on there, and every one fled before him. One almost expected in a moment to see the gleam of a knife. Henrik sprang up and almost kicked the roof, fell back and lay outstretched for a moment, but sprang up again like a spring, and danced sitting upon his haunches. Then he swung across the floor again, and Harald sprang down from his bench and advanced towards him as if he meant to clear the room.

"That'll do! That'll do!" cried Fru Bang. "Harald! Do you hear! Leave off!"

The fiddle ceased, and the two young men soon came to themselves, and in the middle of the floor stood two men-about-town, smiling and bowing to one another.

"Where is my wife?" asked Hiorth again; and at the moment it sounded so comical that there was a shout of laughter.

"I think she's gone up to bed," said Fru Bang reassuringly.

When the music of the last waltz sounded through the room, Reidar went up to Astrid Riis and asked her for the dance. It was the first time he had shown her a little attention;

but she declined, saying she was tired and that besides she did not dance the same kind of waltz as he did.

Reidar reddened and turned to his sister-in-law, who was sitting beside Astrid, saying: "I beg your pardon. I made a mistake. It was you, Ragna, I meant."

When he brought his sister-in-law back to her place, he heard Astrid say clearly and distinctly to Inga: "Oh, dear no! I could never fall in love with a sportsman, for people like that have much more muscle than brains."

Reidar pretended not to have heard, but he had to wipe his forehead.

Paul Tangen was standing outside the house, gazing at a solitary light far away on the mountain. That must be a house, too, where they were dancing. Suddenly silence fell upon the room he had left; the piano was moved and Fru Hiorth's clear voice was heard singing. She sang a *Fruhlingslied* by Schumann, and her voice sounded warm and triumphant.

At about midnight the gong sounded once more, as a signal for retiring to rest.

As soon as Reidar thought every one would be asleep, he got up and dressed quietly. He meant to go across the moor tonight, and down to the station to send another telegram.

At last everything was quiet in the little houses, and the moon was alone out there, shining upon the blue-white snow and the dark woods. The people inside slept the deep, pleasant sleep that one sleeps when the limbs are full of warm blood and respiration is quiet and easy. Astrid Riis, however, was awake. Her evening prayer had gradually become a talk with her dead mother, and now she asked her advice about Reidar.

His first glance had been stony. "What shall I do with him? What would you have done?" the young girl almost whispered, as she lay with her hands behind her head, looking towards the window.

Late that night a solitary *ski*-er glided across the moonlit moor. The wind was icy to his face, and his shadow sped along by his side. While he was dancing the "springdans" he had hit upon an idea for a grain transaction that should make good his loss by the

burning of his mill, if only the telegram to Chicago was in time.

In the morning, his limbs had hungered for movement; now they had acquired the well-controlled strength that could stand yet another spell of exertion. And then there was that conceited girl, who had treated him to nothing but sarcasm. Well, wait a little!

He lighted his pipe and quickened his pace, so that a trail of sparks followed him. Across the desolate waste came the mournful sighing of the wind.

There was great wonderment the next morning when Reidar was not to be found; but as his dog was also gone, the general thought he must have got up early to see whether there were many hares in the neighbourhood. It would be like him, and in the meantime they must be satisfied with that and wait.

An expedition was made to the nearest cairn, and in the bright sunshine, the scattered company toiled up through wood and over hill. Holth was among the last, and when at length he reached the top, breathless and warm, the others had already lighted a fire

and spread fir-branches over the snow to sit upon. *Skis* were taken off, and as the fire-covered space was limited, they had to sit close together. As every one wanted to have the sun in his or her face, it was a matter of course that each leaned back against his or her neighbour; so it became a group in which every lap pillowed a head, while faces shone red against the snow, and eyes half closed beneath the warm rays of the sun.

Paul Tangen talked about starting a fund for the extermination of engineers. "They disfigure everything they touch," he said. "Some day the whole of Norway will be nothing but iron pipes and the smell of petrol. Soon, too, we shall have floating hotels in the air, which will empty their dust buckets upon our heads when we believe we are surrounded by nature. That's what's called progress. No, a price should be put upon the heads of engineers."

They laughed and stretched out their feet. The fire was nice and warm, and shone yellow against the white snow. One or two of the ladies seemed to be dozing.

Harald Bang was standing leaning against a tree-trunk, smiling at the sun and rubbing his face with a handful of snow. He would not trouble to answer the artist, being fully occupied in becoming as sunburnt as possible before once more appearing in Carl Johan Street.

"Every one has his mission," said Captain Ramm, as he lighted his pipe.

"Well, there's some sense in your calling," said Paul Tangen. He was lying with his head on Fru Ramm's lap.

"And what is it?" asked several voices.

"Beautiful bodies," answered the artist. "Every autumn he receives a batch of deformities, and in the following spring delivers them up as Greek statues. That's an education with some sense in it."

Holth had laid his head against Astrid Riis' knee, and he could feel a little pulse beating under the back of his neck. He looked out over the immeasurable landscape spread out under the sunny blue vault of heaven, and lay breathing with such ease. But when this was over? A desire came over him to stretch out

his hands and pray that these moments might last and never come to an end.

A shout was heard a little way off, and a *ski*-er came in sight. It was Reidar, moving as though a little tired. There was a general rising, and inquiries, and he acknowledged that they were right in supposing that he had been looking for hares. *Skis* were put on again amid laughter and jest, and one after another the members of the party set off through wood and down hill, while on the mountain-top lay the last remains of the fire, fir boughs and yellow orange-peel in the white snow, as the voices died away among the hills.

IV

It was late in May, and Astrid Riis sat over her books at the tradesmen's in Stor Street where her mornings were spent. It must be nearly half past one, the sun was shining outside, and while she tried to add up a long column of figures, her thoughts were occupied with the question of where she was to get cheap fish for dinner.

At last the time came when she could shut up the greasy books, put on her hat and hurry away.

A few minutes later she had two small cod wrapped in paper, and as that was not the thing to show one's self in Carl Johan Street with, she hastened up through the town by back streets. The dinner had to be on the table by three punctually, so she had not a minute to lose. She thought how nice her friends would be looking in their spring costumes under the green trees. She herself had to go on wearing her blue serge winter dress,

and when the weather grew warmer she would have to wash her last year's light cotton frock and iron it nicely. Today she had put on a straw sailor hat, so as not to look too wintry.

She turned from a side street up by the palace, whence came the sounds of a military band, and she stopped for a glimpse of the crowd that covered the hill. The sun shone upon the instruments and uniforms, and here and there a spring costume stood out boldly against the dark background. Her friends, male and female, would be promenading there, she supposed. No matter, she must hasten on.

Though only twenty, this young girl had much resting upon her shoulders. Before leaving for her office, where she was due at eight in the morning, she had to make breakfast for her father, put three rooms in order, and make purchases on the market. As she now hurried homewards, she was considering whether she could afford to have a few oranges for a second course at dinner today, and at last she decided to commit this extravagance. After going into a shop, and receiving three of the yellow fruit in a bag, she almost ran on,

for her father was not to be trifled with if the meals came to table a minute after time.

As she stood in her cooking-apron and rolled-up sleeves beside the kitchen fire, there was a ring at the front door, and when she opened it the postman put a couple of letters into her hand. She listened anxiously at the sitting-room door, but her father must be in his room and had heard nothing. The letters were to him, and she saw that they were those everlasting bills of which her brother was the cause; and she hastily crumpled them up and threw them into the fire.

Captain Riis's fate was like that of so many Norwegian officers. They begin their career full of energy and dreams of getting on, but perhaps they have no private means, and little by little have to let some of the officer go, and take up some civil employment as well. As years go on they must find still more extra employment, for there is a family to maintain; and they knock at doors and bow and humble themselves, for it is all only temporary; they think they will be promoted some day. A captain reaches the age of forty and begins to

reckon up when his turn will come; and each year the anxiety increases. He will soon be forty-five, and it must happen now. He pulls himself together on the drill-ground, and trembles before those who have his fate in their hand. Soon he is nearly fifty, but there is still hope. Captain Riis was living in a West Country town when, in the midst of his anxiety, he received a telegram from the general in command to say that he had that day been made lieutenant-colonel. He had enemies, and his wife had been a sorrow to him, but now, in all haste, he gathered his friends together to make merry at his house. While speeches were being made and healths drunk, another telegram came to say that it was a mistake about the promotion. The old officer nearly had a stroke. An enemy must have been at work between the two telegrams, and he soon came to the conclusion that it must have been General Bang. During the years that followed, while he lived in expectation of redress, he slept like a man in a fever. But he waited in vain. One day he was forced to confess to himself that he could never obtain redress; and

from that time he had a difficulty in holding himself as erect as before.

He pulled himself together once more, however. He had a son and a daughter, and when he reached the age-limit, he moved, on their account, into the capital. His son was to be his redress. But his son led a dissolute life, was expelled from the military academy, and was also dismissed from a bank in which he had afterwards obtained employment; and now he had sunk lower, and his father refused to see him again. It was hard, but the old officer still tried to hold himself erect. He still had his daughter, and it was a point of honour with him to pay his son's debts. He could scarcely live upon his pension, but his daughter must help; he sold whatever could be spared, and took a flat in a house in a back yard; he limited himself to one pipe a day, and tried to patch his own shoes. Only when it grew dark did he take his long walks, with his worn silk hat carefully brushed and his old frock-coat buttoned up tightly; but his glance had become so strangely glassy, and he

bowed to no one, and would not see if any one bowed to him.

Today, too, Astrid was fortunate enough to have the dinner on the table as the clock struck three, and at the same moment the sound of her father clearing his throat came from the next room, the door opened and he appeared, still broad-shouldered and erect. His red, beardless face had a hard expression, his grey hair was brushed forward in curls, his faded uniform was unbuttoned, and his trousers looked as if they had gone with a frock-coat once upon a time.

"Pf-f!" he said, putting his finger down his collar.

"Is it your asthma again, father?"

Without answering he seated himself on the creaky sofa, and unfolded his napkin. There was an ominous pause.

"Have you read it?" he asked at length.

"Read what?"

"The paper, of course. He's become a member of a royal commission now again. He! Ha, ha!"

She understood now. Every time he heard

anything about General Bang, it seemed as if all his old wounds were opened afresh, and his breathing became difficult that day.

In a little while he said: "I thought I heard the bell ring. Was it bills again?"

"No," she said, bending over her plate. "It was for me."

He was satisfied, and went on with his fish for a short time, but then he raised his red eyes to her once more. "And who do you get letters from?" he said. "Is it the farmer-princess you stayed with at Easter?"

The young girl laughed a merry laugh. Oh, she had gradually become so accustomed to dissimulate. "Do you suppose it's only girls who write to me?" she said.

The little room served as both dining and drawing-room, and the grey light that fell from the back-yard on to the few remnants of furniture in it would have been melancholy, had it not been for two or three geraniums in flower, standing in the window.

The old man suddenly laid down his knife and fork, and leaning back in his seat, looked at her hard.

"What's the matter, father?" He so often looked at her like that. Did he suspect anything?

"I was thinking in the night how fate can be inherited. Even one's grandchildren will look strangely at a grandfather who never came to anything. The next generation accepts the facts, and asks no questions as to the means by which it rose." And he bent his head as if to look into his thought.

"You ought to go for a walk, father, now, in the middle of the day. There's never so much as a sunbeam gets in to you here."

"And who do you suppose has shut the sun out from me?"

"Oh, it's no good always brooding over that, father."

He laughed scornfully. "No, no, no! You brood over more important things, don't you?"

She turned her head towards the window, as if seeking for something brighter to talk about, but the old man went on. "However, I've decided that the bomb shall now explode."

"The bomb?"

"Yes. As long as he was on the army list,

I was stupid enough to spare him; but now—now I can bear it no longer.”

She felt a shiver run down her back. Here, with her father, it seemed to her that it would be a great day when at last he had his revenge; and yet—her best friend was Inga Bang, and they had been exceedingly kind to her at the general's when she was their guest, and besides—no, that was all.

“What will you do?”

“Time will soon show.” And he returned once more to his dinner.

“Father,” she said suddenly, trying to brighten things up a little. “We’re going to be extravagant today. Can you guess?” And she went into the kitchen for two oranges. The third must be kept for her brother, in case he should steal in to get something to eat.

The surprise did really make the old man's face brighter, and he peeled the yellow fruit with great care. “Well, we must be content, child, as long as we can have a second course once a week.”

“Oh, nonsense! Things will be better some day, you'll see.”

The captain laughed suddenly, showing stumps of yellow teeth. "Yes, of course! Better, yes! It'll end with cut glass and champagne, you'll see." But he again had a difficulty in breathing, his face was distorted, and he put his hand to his throat. The thought of that other one had instantly extinguished this gleam of humour.

While Astrid washed up in the kitchen, he carefully filled his one daily pipe and lay down on the sofa in his own room. The clouds of tobacco-smoke floated about his head, but he turned this way and that without rest. A name, a memory, a painful thought may poison the pillow and make it useless to close one's eyes; and this Captain Riis had felt more than once during the years that were past.

Since he had shut himself up, his whole world had become only a circle of recollections about himself. It was like wandering in a withered wood peopled by dead and living, and all connected with Captain Riis. He fought and lost, he was betrayed and wounded, over and over again, every day, as surely as he

closed his eyes. Sometimes it was so vivid that he spoke aloud and shook his fist.

But secretly he still had a little hope. He was working upon a plan for a new army organisation, and when it was finished—ah, then! He had dim visions of redress on a grand scale, and he remembered what had taken place on such an occasion when he was serving for a time in a French regiment. The general called the happy man up in front of the regiment, a speech, an order on his breast, the roll of drums, present arms! Well, who could tell! In happy moments the event would seem so near that he took out his least faded uniform and brushed it.

It was a comfort to let his thoughts run on this now, and at last his eyelids drooped. There was a sound of singing in the kitchen. Ah me! Youth takes everything easily!

Astrid was scarcely aware of it herself, but when her thoughts were busy with all manner of things at once, she sang even in the street.

She bent over the fire, thinking of her father's threat against the general. Would anything really happen? She turned to the

window and remembered that there was a tennis-party this evening, to which she could not but look forward. The merry Easter party had started a little sports club among themselves, and just now it was tennis. But every time she and Reidar came together, they carried on war. What should she use as a weapon this evening?

There were footsteps on the stair, followed by a gentle knocking, and her brother's fair head appeared at the door. "Can I?" he whispered. "Yes, yes," she answered, "but be careful." And she served up a meal for him, not forgetting the last orange.

The young man seated himself jauntily upon the kitchen dresser and swung his legs while he ate. He was two or three and twenty, with unshaven chin and bloodshot eyes, and shabby clothes. She looked at him with eyes that were almost motherly, but what was she to say? He was her brother, and her father had to suffer for his excesses. It was all very sad, but there was no use in crying any more.

"Where have you been?" she asked in a low voice. "Why, it's nearly a week——"

"I'm working," he interrupted, munching ravenously at his food. "Indeed, I've got my hands full——"

She made a grimace. "Oh, yes!"

"I'm studying the only idealists that are still to be found, namely criminals. For that matter, they oughtn't to be called that, for the true criminals are such as him in there."

Astrid was used to these phrases, and she tossed her head.

"Then you should let the idealists pay your bills," she said.

"Oho!" he cried as he peeled his orange. "Then you don't think that those who bring us into the world without first asking leave have any responsibilities——"

"Now drink a cup of coffee, but be quick! He'll soon be awake."

She put the steaming cup in his hand, and when he had emptied it he went on: "Do you know, I've been wondering how mother came by her end!"

"You frighten me almost. Now you must go."

"Very well then, good-bye," he said, as he

slipped off the dresser. "I'll go home to my wife and children."

"What?" she said, staring at him.

"Oh, well, we'll talk about that another time. Good-bye!"

"Ivar," she said, pressing a two-krone piece into his hand. "You must excuse its not being more."

"My dear girl, you're too good!" he said, looking at her with a smile upon his thin face, and Astrid went up to him, threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him on the forehead. Then she pushed him gently out and closed the door after him; but the tears were in her eyes.

"I thought I heard some one in the kitchen," said the captain, while they were drinking coffee. "Yes, it was the man with the coals," she answered, looking him calmly in the face.

Later in the afternoon, while she was washing and ironing, she began humming again. She was going out this evening, and before her mind's eye there passed pictures of a blue spring sky, green trees, a setting sun, and happy, healthy people playing.

As she sat at the supper-table, she was trying to find an excuse for slipping away, when her father leaned back and looked at her with a mysterious smile.

"I've got something to read to you this evening, my dear."

"No, have you really?"

"Yes. This afternoon, you see, I got a good way on with the section about the division of the Army. It'll make a nice disturbance in the camp, I can tell you, for I've proved clearly that all generals may really be done away with."

"Couldn't you read it to me tomorrow, father?" I was going to the dentist this evening."

His placid face instantly darkened, and his hands began to tremble. "Oh, of course, of course! If mademoiselle has anything more important to attend to, I won't hinder her!" And after supper he went into his own room and slammed the door.

A little later, however, she slipped into his room and said she could listen for half an hour at any rate. He was pacing angrily up and

down the room, but now he grew calmer, found his glasses, and took up a bundle of manuscript. Astrid had her knitting and seated herself by the window, and in his dry voice he went into figures, calculations, technical expressions and arguments that were nothing but Greek to her. She had so often had to listen to it, and there was something touching in the fact that he had no one else to ask advice from. But her thoughts stole away to the tennis-party. What o'clock was it now? She was tired with her day's work, and longed for fresh air, motion and youth.

It had little by little come to be the rule for her to purchase every pleasure with white lies. At first it troubled her greatly, but after each sunny hour she came home the brighter.

What o'clock was it now? The man who sat reading had no idea that a young girl could have a thought for anything outside her own sphere. She was to keep his house, share his poverty, earn money to pay his debts, hate his enemies, and help him to do away with generals. She remembered her brother's words. It was horrid of him, and yet—— Here she

sat herself, filled with bitterness. The others were at the courts by this time, the sun was setting behind the great garden, the evening was passing. Tomorrow she would have to begin again at the same round. Oh, she would like to get up and fly far away to get air.

"What do you think of that?" she suddenly heard. Her father was smiling, and took off his glasses in order to see her better.

"If only it's not too severe," she said, without knowing in the least what it was about.

"Too severe? As if you could be too hard on that rabble! No, just listen to this!"

She sighed and stared straight before her. She felt a peculiar coldness from this reading. And yet he was her father, and she was chained to him, and of course she was fond of him too.

When at last she was free, it was half-past nine, and she hastened away to get at any rate a glimpse of her friends before they went home.

A bright, crimson-clouded sky arched in houses and trees. A couple of white pigeons flew past her so close that they almost touched her face, putting her in such good spirits that

she once more began to hum. Oh, the delightful feeling of a few minutes' freedom. There was much to be sad about, it was true—her brother, his debts, her conscientious scruples for deceiving her father; but out here thoughts of the mountains, *ski*-ing, dancing, blue sky, and young men, flitted through her mind. It was true that her hands were red with her work, that she was not dressed as well as the others, and that perhaps people knew both about her father and her brother; and yet she was now hastening to them like a moth to a candle.

The tennis courts were fenced in with wire netting and surrounded with trees. Reidar Bang had come after the others, and there was no one for him to play with. He was therefore sitting upon a bench with a cigar in his mouth, watching the play. He was vexed at the absence of Fröken Riis this evening, for he had prepared some particularly cutting sarcasms for her, and felt in the mood for a tilt with her. Oh, these self-willed little girls, who imagine themselves somebody!

But there she was! As she entered the

ground and caught sight of him, she suddenly stopped, looked at her hands, blushed, and raised them to her hair. Finally she tossed her head, and barely nodded in answer to his greeting. "Now I can have a game, too!" he said as he came up to her. "Oh, I'm no match for you!" she answered dauntlessly, and opened the box in which they kept their shoes. While she was changing, he was going to look another way, but discovered a hole in the heel of her stocking, whereupon he turned away in earnest and looked down. That hole in her stocking, those red hands—they all at once gave him such a strange feeling.

"Well, I'm ready," she said behind him, coming forward in her white canvas shoes, and with her racquet in her hand. Now he wanted to talk to her differently from the way he had done before, and pointed to a little locket she wore round her neck. "That little thing is really pretty, Fröken Riis. Did it belong to—to your mother?"

She looked down and involuntarily put her hand up to the locket, as though to guard it from his glance. Yes, it had been her mother's,

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and perhaps there had been something wrong with her; but why should he come with his arrogant glance and want to touch it? Before she quite knew what she did, she had torn the locket from her neck, and put it in her pocket. "Are we going to play, or are we not?" she asked with flashing eyes.

"Oh, but really, Fröken Riis, I never meant——" And he took off his hat in an embarrassed way.

"Are we going to play or not?" she repeated in a high voice, looking as if she meant to go.

"Yes, of course, of course! I'm quite ready."

The ball began to fly between them. She threw off her hat, and her golden hair shone bright against green trees and blue sky. There came cries and laughter from the other players, and soon she laughed, too, louder than any of them.

"Take it!" She ran backwards and forwards, waves of hair fell down over her glowing face and she was continually pushing them back. She was delighted to find that he was playing badly today, and she took him in

splendidly with little tricks; her whole body reflected her triumph, her nostrils quivered and her eyes shone. Were there really such things as troubles in the world? *She* did not know them, at any rate.

Dr. Holth sat outside the enclosure, looking on. He was not a member of the club, and yet there was something that drew him there every evening. At first he thought there was something ridiculous about these grown-up people, who ran hither and thither so excitedly occupied with that ball; but now he sat and envied them. It was as if the game made them children of the air, the light and the green grass. He looked at Fru Ramm, who was playing a single with Paul Tangen, at Fru Hiorth and Captain Ramm, Inga Bang and the young architect. One smile escaped and met another, and the ball flew like a dart between two players. And all the while it is nothing more than that faces may glow, lungs inhale air, lips smile, and thoughts take a refreshing bath as they flutter like butterflies.

It was at Astrid Riis, however, that Holth looked most. She was now so warm that her

blouse clung fast to her back, and her head with its golden hair darted hither and thither like a red cloud. Then there were her well-formed hips, her round waist, the gladness of her voice; it all seemed to him to make up a poem on eternal spring.

"Well, what are you sitting there for, and only looking on?" said Paul Tangen, as he passed, literally shining with perspiration.

"Outside is the best place for me," answered Holth.

"Oh, well, of course the only intelligent thing to do is to sit hanging one's head and holding a skull in one's hand. Oh, dear, if you could only forget your own greatness!"

Holth tried to smile, but felt hurt.

When Astrid had won her game with Reidar, it was too late to play a return. They saluted one another with their racquets, and hastened to different corners to change their shoes. Reidar meant to go home with the young girl, but when he looked for her, the bird was flown.

Astrid had hurried away, for she thought he would want to give an explanation, and to

prevent this would vex him a little. She fled homewards on rapid feet. Oh, yes, she had indeed been at a dentist's. Even when she got in she was so warm that she had to improvise a shower-bath in the kitchen; and it was a pleasure to stand naked on the cool floor, and then rub with a coarse towel until her skin was red and fresh. Then she blacked her father's boots and put them in front of his door, and finally crept into bed happy and light-hearted. Tomorrow the round of work would begin again, but now it all seemed fun.

V

Fru HOLTH was laying the table for dinner. The tablecloth was not clean, the glasses were chipped, and the children were making a noise round her. Floor and chairs were covered with pieces of sewing and patching, children's clothes and toys; but fortunately the corner room was locked up and all in order, with its palms and plush furniture, in case any one should come.

Fru Holth had once been beautiful, but now she was a worn-out housewife, with hollow cheeks and a bad figure. She had also once been fond of music and reading, but now she contented herself with shopping. She looked at the things in the large shops with a peculiar feeling of happiness, and it was a pleasure to her to handle laces and velvets; but at the last moment she hesitated and promised to come again.

When she had married Jörgen Holth, every one had predicted a brilliant future for him;

and in her own heart she had not given up the hope of it yet. Every time she expected him home to dinner, she dreamt almost unwittingly of some surprise—a professorship, a head-mastership, something or other delightful. She would hear the key turn in the lock, and would stand trembling a little, every day, year after year.

Jörgen Holth was on his way home, a sturdily-built man with books under his arm. Since his Easter holiday, he had made a round every day, so as to pass as many gardens as possible. It was the middle of May, the apple-trees were sprinkled with their pink and white blossoms, and grass and foliage were green and fresh. But when at last he had to turn into the narrow street in which he lived, his steps grew slow and spiritless.

As he mounted the stairs, he noticed the bad air from the back-yard; and when he reached the third storey and opened the hall-door, he was met by the smell of washing, and exclaimed: “Goodness me, Selma, can’t you keep that kitchen door shut!”

Fru Holth had stood trembling a little, and

now quickly closed the door; and they were soon all sitting round the table, while she helped the soup. There were five children, from Hans, who was thirteen, to the one-year-old Sigrid, who sat on her mother's knee. The children were not clean, and their mother still wore a stained dressing-gown; and Holth kept his head down, and tried to think of something else.

He had been so different since he had returned, refreshed and rejuvenated, from his Easter holiday. He dreaded going home every day, and was glad when he could go out; and he was ashamed that it was so. These big children, one of whom would soon be a man, reminded him that he himself was no longer young. Formerly he had not noticed how untidy and worn Selma was, and all the disorder and closeness had not troubled him; but now he felt an indefinable desire to hide it all, so that none of those young women should come to know anything about it.

He rose from the table.

"Oh, but you can't have had enough to eat surely," she exclaimed; but he murmured

something about being busy, and went into his study. It was a small room looking on to the backyard, and for a moment he stood looking out at the grey wall opposite the window; then he sat down on the sofa, staring straight before him.

In a drawer lay half-finished pieces of work, by means of which he could have risen in the world; but for years he had always hurried to school from a sense of duty to his family, and in the evenings taken extra work from a sense of duty to his family, but never had he felt it so hard as now.

Up on the mountains there had been young men who had great plans, and they talked about them as of some new sport. And there had been young girls with slender waists, and they danced and breathed out their encouragement towards them.

Holth lay back on the sofa and closed his eyes. "There were young people, too, when you were twenty. Boys and girls set out for the country on Sunday mornings, but you sat at the window with your book. In the evening they streamed back down the street, warm

and glowing, with bunches of foliage and lilac, and you still sat at the window with your book. And now? What do you live for, Jörgen Holth? What have you attained? What are your hopes for the future?"

He had accompanied Astrid Riis on her way home from the tennis-ground yesterday, and it was an event for him. They made a walk of it in the light but cloudy evening. They sat on a seat and under the trees in the palace park, and watched the swans in the pond; and for the time he became a different being. He was no longer the father of growing children, or a machine for making political speeches with the bitterness aroused by adversity; no, he was twenty and the world was new. As he talked he carried the young girl with him, showering down upon her words and images, born at the moment, like little airy poems. And after that to come home and be dragged back into himself! The air in the rooms, the big children, the faded wife, his debts, his troubles, his duties. The mirror showed him a wrinkled face and hair turned grey, trousers that bulged at the knees, and a coat that was

shiny at the elbows. He had prayed last night, like the Provençal poet: "Lord, preserve me from becoming young when it is too late."

Suddenly Fru Holth appeared at the door, and he sprang up as if he had been caught in something wrong.

"You must really excuse me," she said, "but I haven't a farthing left."

He stood struggling with a strange irritation. "But dear me, Selma, didn't you get fifty kronas the day before yesterday?"

"Yes, but there were bills owing both to the baker and the butcher, and now Ragnhild must have shoes, and Jens will soon have no trousers to go to school in. Where do you think I'm to get money from?"

"And where do you think I'm to get it from?"

She stood rubbing her hands together, timid and imploring. "I thought you had your salary paid you today."

"Oh, dear, yes, if that poor three hundred kronas is to be eaten up at once, there they are." And he threw his pocket-book upon the table.

Fru Holth sank upon a chair and sighed. "I only wish," she said, "that you'd take over the house yourself, Jörgen. I save and save from morning till night, and go long distances to get something a penny cheaper. I soon shan't have a dress to my back, but all the thanks I get is scolding and ill-temper every single day." She passed her hand across her eyes and added: "You've grown so strange of late, both to me and the children. I'm at my wits' end."

"How much do you need?"

"Oh, give me whatever you like."

He began to walk up and down, and said more gently: "I do wonder whether any one else in our position wastes as much money as we do."

"Oh, you know very well, Jörgen, that it's the same story all over the town. Everything's getting dearer, but I think I manage with less than most."

He stopped. "Well, I must have a hundred for taxes now, if we don't want our goods distrained. But there's the rest."

"No, no, you must have some yourself."

He pressed the money into her hand, however, but she kept putting some of it back into his, saying that she did not want to be unreasonable, and that he must not leave himself without pocket-money. It ended in his putting a ten-krone note into his waist-coat pocket, thinking, with a sigh, of the new suit of clothes he had dreamt about.

With another apology she slowly rose and went quietly out.

There was no more room for dreams in here now, for she had filled the little room with an atmosphere of daily toil. Indeed! She would soon not have a dress to her back!

He walked up and down, and called to mind the bailiff's pretty daughter, who fifteen years ago had placed her future in his hands. She even had a little money, which enabled him to go abroad for a couple of years. But then? He had not managed to make life particularly easy for her, and what had he been busy with of late? He hung his head like a boy that is being scolded, then sank on to a chair, and once more fell into a brown study.

Of course, Selma must have a dress. A

publisher had offered him proof-reading, but he had refused it in the hope of stealing time for that work in his table-drawer. But he must let that lie for the present. He would go up to the publisher today. Selma should have a dress.

But when the decision was made, he still sat with his chin in his hands, staring out at the grey wall.

There was a knock at the door, which he did not hear, and in walked Paul Tängen, in a smart spring suit, and his light Panama hat in his hand.

"Good morning, you troglodyte, that are never seen! I've news for you."

Holth felt revived by this visit, and sprang up from his chair exclaiming: "Sit down, sit down! Glad to see you!"

The artist sat down, not forgetting to draw his trousers up at the knees. "I say," he said, "is it educational and of service to the community to sit in such an atmosphere?"

"It wouldn't be any better if I opened the window. You see what a place I live in."

"Then why in the world do you live here?"

"Why in the world should one be poor and powerless?" retorted Holth, beginning to walk up and down.

"That's what I don't understand either," said Tangen, taking out his cigarette-case. "Of course, I've tried poverty too, but I didn't find it worth keeping on with."

"You talk as if it were my own fault!"

"Whose fault do you make it then? Ah, yes, by-the-by, you socialists of course have the community and capital."

"Oh, it's all very well for you to talk big——"

"It's your own fault that you haven't a reason for doing it, too. Honestly now, why aren't you a famous man? Why do you go about whimpering that you get nothing done? Why do you live here?"

Holth stood still with his hands in his pockets, staring at his visitor. Tangen carefully lighted his cigarette. "Excuse my smoking," he said, "but it'll freshen up the air a little. And in short, it may be considered a mark of genius to ship your oars and let everything drift, but——"

“And who’s shipping their oars?”

“I don’t think it shows a more profound intelligence to be ill than to be well, and I’m old-fashioned enough to consider that it’s even better to triumph over adversity than to give way to it. Which do you like best now—scent or stench? Which does your ambition require—admiration or pity?”

Holth sat down on the sofa, and gazed at Tangen with a stiff smile.

The artist went on: “I think I perceive that you don’t like me today. However, I’ve come to tell you that Reidar Bang is going to have a big party out at his house, for he’s lost a lot of money lately.”

“Lost? Is that something to give a party for?”

“In my opinion, yes. I went out to Bygdö to see him, and found him in a wretched state. That strong man was drinking medicine out of various bottles, and said he had had bad dreams; and you know what that means for him. He had a headache and was sleeping badly; and in Hamburg there’s a bankruptcy that will make a clean sweep of a hundred

thousand kroners. He had tried riding, sailing, swimming, gymnastics and tennis, but only got worse and worse. So I said he should give a party."

"That was certainly good advice," said Holth with an attempt at a smile. He was still sitting motionless, staring at Tangen.

"Yes, I told him a little story from my poorest period in Paris. A wealthy Mexican had bought pictures from me for twenty thousand kroners, and for some nights my wife and I could not sleep for sheer joy. Oh, all the things we would buy and make ourselves fine with, with those thousands which we had not yet got, it is true. Then came the Mexican's servant and announced the death of his master. The money was not paid, the bargain was off. We were stunned for a day or two, but at last I got up, smashed the first thing I came across, and swore I'd give a party. I went out, borrowed or stole money, bought an expensive velvet dress for the wife, and kept a studio cancan going for a day or two, and wine flowing. 'What for?' people asked. 'Because our dreams are in ruins,' I said, and after that

I could look at myself in the glass again and start afresh."

Holth shook his head. This took his breath away.

"My view is," Tangen went on, as he flicked the ash from his cigarette, "that one should make one's self respected by fate. If it is too interfering, you give it a kick and say: 'Keep your distance, my friend. I intend to be the master of us two.' Well, Reidar Bang also thought this a good suggestion, and asked me to help him to make the affair as splendid as possible. You'll come, of course?"

"Have you come here to make fun of me?"

Tangen threw away his cigarette, and leaned back in his chair. "I thought it would do you a jolly lot of good to get another freshening-up. We can't get on at all without some surplus joy in life. Do you think any one can become happy by sitting in such an atmosphere and staring at that wall there?"

"Do you think any one can become happy by neglecting his duty?"

Tangen laughed. "There isn't such a word as duty in my dictionary. Whatever we don't

do for pleasure will be worthless; but the pleasure comes if we give our life instincts a little play. Honestly, you're too good to be a slave to exercise-books and a few stupid calculations."

Holth got up and answered quickly: "I've been that for many years." And ashamed of this confession, which seemed almost like treachery towards Selma and the children, he passed his hand across his eyes, and turned to the door.

"Look here, my friend, I think I can see what's the matter. Is your digestion all right?"

"Yes," said Holth, involuntarily turning round.

"Then why aren't you happy?"

"Look here, Paul Tangen!"—and Holth sat down again—"It's so confoundedly easy for you to talk, who always come out on top."

"If you had a little feeling of responsibility for your family," continued the painter, "you'd gather together so much *joie de vivre* that you'd be fit for anything."

Holth burst into a laugh. "Gather together *joie de vivre*. Perhaps for the sake of my

family I ought to go in for dissipation and other men's wives and daughters like——”

“I understand you,” said Tangen. “But you shouldn't despise us who gather a little honey from various flowers, so that our hearts can have something to feed upon when the winter comes. Confound it, is there any virtue in being faithful to your wife when she has to work herself to death?”

Holth's lips trembled. He was getting angry.

“As for you and your unhappiness,” said the painter, “I would suggest that you shouldn't begin by kicking fate. Begin, for instance, by ordering a new suit.”

Holth knew Tangen's way of treating his friends, and at last he could not help laughing. “I can't afford it,” he said with a sigh.

Tangen put on his hat. “Has it never occurred to you,” he said, “that Dame Fortune really exists, and that she doesn't care for men with shiny coats and unshaven chins? Come with me to my court tailor.”

In the end, Holth actually went into town with his friend, but only for the sake of the

walk. They went through the park under the trees, and the artist said: "Haven't you noticed that a rejuvenescence is just now passing over Norway? The new generation is not stupified with politics or literary hospital atmosphere. No, they dress well, go in for sport, dancing and physical training. Out of the joy of living comes action, and if you only wait you'll see. So first the new suit, then another flat, then some one to take your place in the school while you finish your books, and if you're not man enough for that, try and fall in love with a pretty girl, and she'll put life into you."

Before he knew what he was about, Holth was standing with Tangen outside the tailor's door, and without rightly understanding how it came about, he found himself inside being measured. It was folly, it was nonsense, and yet—it was done now.

When they came out again, Tangen said: "Do you know, I believe Reidar Bang's suffering from spring-fever, and I shouldn't wonder if it wasn't on account of Astrid Riis. If

that stone were to take fire, he ought to begin to take medicine in earnest."

After a brief pause, Holth answered: "Well, he's young, and free, and well-off. It would be a good match for her."

On his way home alone, he walked with bent head. Yes, of course. Reidar Bang was young. And free.

He would go to the merrymaking, however, and try to forget his own years. Light dresses against the blue water, bonfires along the shore, music and dancing. Astrid Riis would be there, too.

He wandered about for a long time in the park. He sat upon the seat where they, too, had sat yesterday. But at last he had to go home. Exercise-books, examination preliminaries, municipal elections, lectures, and the literary work in his table-drawer. And then there was the proof-reading and Selma's dress.

But when Fru Holth opened the door of his study to tell him supper was ready, she stood still with her eyes almost starting out of her head; for her husband was gliding round and round, practising a waltz.

VI

It was by no means always that Paul Tangen was in good spirits. When alone in his studio, he would often lie for hours on a couch, plunged in deepest melancholy. He often felt uncertain with regard to his art, and he had enemies whose opinions would then flow in upon him and overwhelm him. He was sick with impatience at the time it took to become world-renowned, as he thirsted to be, and he would grow so weary of these continual struggles to get further, that he felt tempted to give it all up and return to ordinary life.

At such times, memories of his childhood came to him like actual visions. He was mind-
ing the goats on the mountain, he was fishing in the lake, he felt again his terror of thunder and lightning because it might be the Day of Judgment; but he also saw the evening array itself in crimson and gold as a reminiscence of paradise. It is true he was ragged and dirty then, but on the other hand, it was holiday

when he washed. Christmas Eve, with the glow from the stove and a clean shirt airing over a chair-back, filled him with a far greater solemnity than a whole town full of church bells now. And then there were the girls——

It helped a little every summer to strap a knapsack on his back, and wander about at haphazard through forest and mountain. He would go from sæter to sæter, and seemed to get very near to the old days when he joined company with woodcutters, or sat down beside a goatherd, or chopped wood and fetched water for a dairymaid. But when he went on again, something seemed to follow at his back in the clouds and twilight. It was age, whispering that what is past can never be recalled.

The golden light of summer was now streaming through the skylight, and he suddenly started up as if awaking from sleep. The door opened, and Fru Tangen entered, dressed in a loose white dress, and holding a little girl by the hand.

“May we come in?” she said with an anxious smile. “I only wanted your opinion about my dress.”

She was a woman of about thirty, of medium height, slender and dark. She had once been prettier than she was now, but then it had cost her many a struggle to be resigned and look as if all was well.

Tangen looked critically at his wife's dress without speaking. She had gradually become quite dependent on his taste, and he designed not only her dresses, but also her bracelets, rings, brooches and pins, which were all little works of art.

"The large fold over the left hip isn't right," he said, going up to her to rearrange it. "But except for that it's all right." He put his arm round her waist; there was something so fresh and clean about her; it was her hair, it was the white dress, it was the warmth of summer in her skin. He took her head between his hands and kissed her lips and eyes.

"I really have the best wife in the world. That's what I always say."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure you say so!"

He gave a little sigh and turned his eyes away for a moment, but then looked into hers again, smiling.

"I was just lying and thinking what would have become of me if the chain hadn't been so strong."

"Is it I that am the chain?"

"Yes. Everybody knows that I'm a hen-pecked husband."

"Oh, you're very much to be pitied! Have you been working hard today?"

"No; but then you haven't been in before."

"Oh, nonsense!" she said with a roughish smile. "Come, Ragnhild," she went on to the little girl who was occupied in looking at the numerous pictures along the wall. "Come now; we mustn't disturb father, you know."

Tangen took the little girl up in his arms and carried her to her mother, kissing her on the forehead as he did so.

"Shall we play blind-man's-buff today, papa?" she asked.

"Yes, dear. Come up a little before dinner, and you shall blindfold me again."

"Good-bye, then!" said her mother as she disappeared with the little girl.

Tangen stood listening to their footsteps as they died away, then stripped off his coat, put

on his painting blouse, and began to work. It was always good to receive a visit from this woman, who never uttered a word of reproach, but accepted with gratitude what he gave. Heigh-ho!

He now placed on his easel a half-finished picture, which in fact was more a poem. Goodness knew whether anything would ever come of it, but when he was in good spirits it was a pleasure to him to stand and work at it. 'The Procession' it was called, and he had really got the idea from his brother. It happened one day that the two brothers were wandering through the town and imagining an entirely new capital. They pulled down blocks, and built up beautiful ones in their places; they planned new streets, opened squares, and erected monuments. Henrik Tangen had even begun to make drawings of what they had planned, and for a time worked at them night and day like an inspired poet; and his work was indeed a poem in buildings, colonnades, fountains, gardens and parks. "It will scarcely be in our time," he said; "but it will come some day. Not in twenty years, scarcely in

forty; but it will come. In a hundred years, Kristiania will be the Athens of Europe. See here——”

One day Paul too began to give life to some of this dream-town. The picture showed a temple standing on Ekeberg Hill, with a wide flight of marble steps leading up to it. The great building stood out against a blue summer sky, flecked with silvery clouds, and was surrounded by fir, birch and bird-cherry trees. Up the broad steps went a procession of young women, their slender forms dimly outlined through their flowing white robes, and with sandals on their feet. Their faces were bright and confident, and in one hand they bore branches of apple-blossom, ripened by the sun and the fresh breeze from the blue fjord.

It was this dream of women of the far-off future that he was now endeavouring to bring to life. There were none such now; no, but there would be some day. They would be children of their country's wind and sun; they would be the embodiment of the poetry of the mountains, the sea and the light nights. Perhaps they would live in houses where there was

never an inharmonious sound, and where the air was always pure. Perhaps they would live in an age when only one thing would be punished as a sin, namely, bad taste. Perhaps they would be priestesses of a new religion so beautiful that no one now could have any conception of it. Where were they going? To sacrifice. To whom? To the God they worship—Light perhaps. Were they singing now, or were they going to sing when they came up? Song was already in their eyes, smile, and the movement of their limbs; and the pink and white apple-blossom in their hands was wet with dew.

It was a colour-poem on young forms, but gradually the artist's own recollections were mingled with it, and he often stood back from it with a smile. Yes, he ought to know these faces as they came more and more to life. Yes, of course; they were—they were women he had—known in years past.

So they wanted to join this procession, did they? Very well, though many of them were no longer either pretty or young. "Is that

you?" he would say with a smile. "And you, too? But don't you know you're dead?"

He was just standing with his palette in one hand, and lighting a cigarette when there was a tap at the door, and in a vexed tone he called "Come in."

The door opened and General Bang entered, in overcoat and silk hat.

"Good morning, monsieur!" he said, a little out of breath. Once inside the door, the old gentleman stood with his hat in one hand and his stick in the other, looking about him. Tangen wiped his hands and went forward to welcome him, but the general still stood examining the room from floor to ceiling.

"Is this a studio?"

"That's what it's supposed to be. Have you never——?"

"No, sir. It's the first time I ever entered a temple of art. Indeed! And that—is that art? What a number! I thought you sold most of your works. Oh, but see here!" and he took up a position in front of the easel, and took out his glasses. For some time he stood looking at it in silence, and at last exclaimed:

"Confoundedly pretty models you get! What does your wife say to it?"

"Oh, of course my wife is the model for all of them," said Tangen carelessly, with a smile.

"So I should think, sir! Oh, yes! So I should think!" He looked at the picture again, and then turned to the artist. "Have you been successful with the fair sex?"

"Unfortunately, no. It's only the older beaux who understand the art."

"Oh, but they don't understand it either, not all of them, at least," said the general, looking away to the window. "One will do all he can with no result, while another is occupied with altogether different things and can have any number. Success—and failure—they're things one can never understand."

Tangen drew up an armchair, and the general looked first at him and then at the chair, and finally said: "Well, I may as well sit down, for I've come to speak to you on a very important matter, or rather to call you to account." He seated himself, placed his hat upon the table and supported both hands upon his stick. Tangen felt a little uneasy, but for

the moment he was not aware of any wrongdoing that concerned this man.

"You have a nice brother, sir," began the general, looking sharply at the artist. "Well—no one can hear us here, I suppose."

"Oh, dear, no!"

"What do you say yourself about your brother?"

"He has just one fault. He's so much greater a man than I."

"Thanks. But let me tell you that both you and your brother are rogues. What do you say to that?"

"You are always right, sir." And Tangen offered him a cigar.

"No, thank you. Keep your cigars to yourself, and don't put me off with attentions. I come to you because you introduced your brother into my house, and you must be responsible for what he does."

"I only wish I had no worse responsibility."

"There now! You think it's nothing if he turns my daughter's head so that she neither

sleeps nor eats, and goes about talking nonsense about meaning to marry him!"

"Doesn't he want to marry her then?"

The general jumped up. "Wants to! Did you ask whether he wants to marry my—my daughter?"

Tangen looked at the general and smiled. There was a pause.

"Why don't you say something?"

"To tell the truth, my brother is such a rising man that there'll be a rush for him among the girls; but I think he might be content with a single one—your daughter, for instance."

The old man stamped on the floor, and seemed inclined to move up and down, but he stood still.

"Be content, eh? With my daughter, eh? Well, I don't want to offend you, but—your—brother——"

"Well, my brother has been a carpenter."

"Carpenter—well, well, it wasn't really that, but——" And the general looked questioningly at the other and compressed his lips.

"It comes in very handy now that he's an architect."

"Architect! May I ask which houses he's built?"

"Supposing I were to ask what battles you have fought in, sir?"

The general's face flushed, and he turned as if to go, but stopped again. "Let me tell you," he said, "that—that your brother must leave my daughter alone! The fact is I've thought of some one else for her."

"In four or five years, every one will be saying that she's made a good match."

The general threw out his hand and began to walk up and down. Tangen stood still, apparently occupied with his picture. There was a fresh pause, while the old man paced up and down. At last he said: "I say, young man, were you really a peasant lad?" He was no longer quite so angry.

Tangen looked at him and smiled, but made no answer.

"And your brother—is he really——"

"Oh, it's very possible that my brother's better connected."

"Ha, ha, ha! You're not bad at answering! But let me tell you that I've had an idea for a long time that your brother was up to something with my daughter, and I'd have shown him the door long ago, if—if I—well, confound it, I—I—when all's said and done, I like him."

"You're always right, sir."

"And the confounded part of it is that he's not only turned my daughter's head, but my wife's too, so that there's no peace for me at home now. It's quite preposterous!"

"May I not now offer my brother's father-in-law a cigar?"

"Yes, I may just as well take it at once, for I suppose the battle's lost anyhow."

"And perhaps a glass of cold white wine this hot day?"

"Wine! No, thank you, you'll not get me as far as that. I came here to drive you into a corner, and now I'm going. Good-by!" And he took up his hat and stick, and drew on one glove.

"I've got some Johannisberger from 1850."

The general pretended not to hear, but

murmured "Goodby" again and prepared to go. At the door, however, he turned. "What did you say that wine was?"

"We'll see in a moment," said the artist, going to the bell and ringing.

"You're a confounded rogue!" sighed the general, coming slowly back.

A little later they were sitting with the tall bottle of white wine in ice beside them, while they smoked and toasted one another. No one could be more genial than the old officer when he liked. Suddenly he leaned back and looked at his companion.

"I say," he said, "what's the matter with my son Reidar? Have you noticed how different he is?"

"It's the spring, sir. It's a dangerous time for young people."

"La femme?"

"Do you think, sir, that a man of any importance ever goes through a spring without being in love?"

The general stretched out his legs and laughed. "It's those confounded Easter parties, that's what it is. So many engagements

have come about up on the mountains, that I'm thinking of pulling down the houses. What was I going to say? Oh, yes. Do you know anything about Fröken Riis?"

"She's a fine girl, and pretty, too. But they say she's got an unhappy home."

The general's face reddened with the wine, and he dropped his eyes. The sun had passed away from the skylight, and the large room was filled with a bluish light.

"Her father, Captain Riis, was a comrade of mine. There now, he was another man who cut a dash and set to work to get on, but—well, there luck comes in again. It was never any use, and at last he got swelled head, and was venomous, too, and he is that still."

"They say his wife was beautiful," said Tangen innocently, as he lighted a fresh cigar.

The general looked at him sharply, and then emptied his glass. "Yes," he said, "there's no doubt she was good-looking. Good morning, sir." And he rose, took up

his hat, and walked a little stiffly towards the door.

"We shall meet at Reidar's at his Midsummer Eve party, I suppose? It's put off until then, isn't it? And of course you're helping him to put a little style into it."

"It's nice that you're to be one of the party, sir."

"Be one of the party. You may take your oath that where there are young people I'm one of the party." And he waved his hat and went out backwards. But the next moment he appeared in the doorway again, as if he had forgotten something.

"By-the-by, have you ever noticed that a young girl can be so exactly the image of her mother that—that you feel yourself taken back twenty years? You're right about Fröken Riis being a pretty girl." And he nodded and disappeared once more. Tangen went downstairs with him.

He had scarcely settled to work again, when there was a loud knock at the door, and Henrik entered with a cigar in his mouth and his straw hat on the back of his head.

“Bonjour, Monsieur!” he said gaily. The artist, in a trice, turned his picture round, for he would not have his brother see it for the world.

“Sit down, man, and don’t look here!”

“What in the world——”

“Sit down, and quickly, too, and don’t move!”

“Goodness me, do you think I’m so keen to see what you’re daubing at!” And the younger man threw himself on to a couch.

“I can tell you I’ve had my work cut out just now to save you from bolts and bars,” said the elder brother with a serious face.

“I can quite believe it.”

“There have been two constables here with the girl’s father, wanting to know where you’re to be found. The father was green and yellow with rage. What in the devil’s name have you done with the girl?”

Henrik removed the cigar from his mouth and slowly rose. “I say, Paul, what’s all this about?”

“What’s it all about? Don’t you know that there’s the house of correction for a

carpenter who makes love to a general's daughter?"

At this the younger man burst into a laugh of relief, and threw himself back on the couch again. "Are you sitting and drinking in the very middle of the morning?" he said.

"I've had to fetch out the first bottle of wine for your wedding. Perhaps there's a little left. Your health!"

The younger brother still regarded the elder with reverence, and when Paul talked about women, Henrik became quite bashful.

He now emptied his glass, and said with a smile: "Do you remember, Paul, when you brought me in from the country, and when at first I slept on the floor of your room?"

"And when we took a pair of trousers on tick in one shop, and pawned them in another to get money for our supper?"

"Yes. How different it is now!"

"What are you doing now, boy? I never see you," said Paul, trying to look severe.

"Doing? I go about intoxicating myself with scenery and people; that's what I'm doing. When you've been away for five years,

you feel famished for your own country. Last night I slept under a tree in Nordmark, this morning I breakfasted with a workman at Grorud, and today I'm going to dine at the general's. How beautiful it all is, isn't it? The people, the wooded hills round the town, the fjord, the islands, the ships that come and go, but most beautiful of all—the women. I met the young wife of a workman on a path up in Nordmark, and I emptied my purse and told her she should have it all because she was so pretty, and because she met me just there. She blushed and looked prettier still, and went on with her eyes on the ground. Do you know what it means to live? It's something of that sort. Can you conceive that anybody can be unhappy?"

"Be quiet, boy! You're in love, of course!"

The other leaned back and looked straight before him.

"Then every now and then I came upon a white house among the green trees, and I was so glad every time; for oh, those beaver-huts in dragon-style, and with boils on all sides—shocking! Isn't it strange that only when a

human habitation resembles a leper do our prophets become enthusiastic and call it national. No, no, we must have an architectural style that is born of our scenery—of the curves of the mountains and hills, the majesty of the trees, the strength of the men, the easy carriage of the women. But wait! It will come some day, and it will trickle out over the world like a rejuvenating flood. Wait, wait!”

“Be quiet, boy! You’re in love!”

“Well, you can’t see that in our architecture, anyhow—that its masters have been in love.”

“And what’s your news?”

Henrik got up and swung round on the floor. I’ve taken a place in an architect’s office—in the meantime—at two hundred kroner a month.”

“And that’s what you’re going to marry upon?”

“Of course. And if her rich relations are afraid that we shall be a burden to them, they’re very much mistaken. We’ve agreed only to spend what we earn ourselves.”

It sounded very well, but Paul thought with anxiety how this enthusiastic young man might become a slave to his work in order to earn money for his family.

"But what's that I see?" exclaimed Henrik. "Have you begun to model?" And he gazed into the background of the studio, where there stood a bust swathed in a wet sheet.

Paul coloured as if his brother had surprised him in a ridiculous weakness; and a brother is the last person to whom that is allowed.

"Let it alone!" he said, emptying the last of the wine into the glasses. "But don't you ever feel a desire for other forms of art? I should like to combine painting, music and sculpture in a single work."

"Why, that's just what architecture does! It's the human mind in stone—philosophy and astronomy, poetry and music, colour and line. There's really no need of any other art."

"Be quiet! You're in love!" said the painter, raising his glass.

They sat for some time talking, and at last Henrik stretched himself full length on the couch. "I don't think I slept much last night; the blossoming bird-cherry I lay and looked up into was so much too beautiful."

Paul got up and began doing a little here and there in the studio; and when, after a little, he looked at his brother, the young man with the pale face lay with his chin in the air asleep.

Paul stood looking at him with a peculiar smile. How would things go with him, and how long would his soul keep as fresh and fiery as it now was?

He found a rug, which he spread with maternal care over his brother, and then went quietly out, leaving him to sleep undisturbed.

VII

EVERY time Astrid Riis had been one of the merry party at the general's, she seemed to bring home a quantity of sunshine. It was true she was wrong to deceive her father as she did, but it was a comfort that there was at any rate one member of the general's family whom she could not bear, namely Reidar. Every time she was able to show him coldness, or say something cutting to him, she felt her conscience lightened. Thank goodness, she had not quite gone over to the enemy yet!

All at once, however, the young merchant altered his behaviour toward her, and became polite and attentive. Astrid felt it was a triumph. She would manage to humble the proud man still more! And yet at the same time she was a little afraid. How was this going to end?

Her father was ailing for a few days, and she had to stay at home; and now it seemed

as if not only her father's complaints, but every little thing in the house acted upon her and called her back into her old ways. The atmosphere was heavy indoors, the sun did not shine in until the evening, and only a glimpse of the sky was to be seen above the housetops, but the flowers in the window seemed so neglected that it became a pleasure to her to be there and tend them again, and even the copper kettle in the kitchen seemed to ask her where she had been. "Have you betrayed your father, yourself and us?" And when she had to go in to the old man, it was with bowed head.

"I won't do it again," she said to herself. "If father were to die now, I should never have another happy day."

So she stayed at home, and the copper kettle grew brighter, the window-plants more vigorous, and her father in better spirits, because she took such a lively interest in his great plans for army organisation; but she herself began to pass sleepless nights, and it was hard to get up in the morning, and

the day seemed so unspeakably grey and long.

There awoke in her young body a kind of hunger for blue sky and happy motion; and when she left her office, and took a road past as many gardens and groups of trees as possible, and then had to hurry home, it was like going into a prison. It was not only that her home was poor, sunless and confined, but its range of ideas was nothing but plans of revenge and pain; and she often felt it so clammy and uninviting that she wanted to shake it off.

Her brother came now and then by the back stairs to get something to eat, and while he as usual spoke evil of the old man, Astrid sat quietly listening. She shook her head, it is true, but each time she shook it a little less; for she had to confess to herself that General Bang was certainly not a monster. It was inconceivable that he could have wanted to crush any one. Was her father mistaken, or——?

But once more she shook it off. It was too bad of her to think such things of her father.

An invitation came for her to Reidar Bang's Midsummer Eve party, and she declined it. But she was obliged to have a summer dress, and in order to be able to afford it, she dismissed the woman who had done the heaviest part of the cleaning for her, and washed floors and stairs herself; and she was often thoroughly tired out when she went to bed. Her hands grew rough and her arms red; and when she looked in the glass, she thought there were rings under her eyes.

More of her brother's bills had come to the house, and after a couple of sleepless nights, the captain decided to go out and look for some sort of work. It was no road to glory he trod; he was old and would be rejected, but he went. He knocked at several doors, and tried to hold himself erect as he went to the next, and at last was given some map-work for a firm of engineers. Then one day he stood with his glasses half-way down his nose, trying to draw. It went well for a time, but soon his eyes failed him, and his hand was no longer steady. But it must be done.

One day he read that General Bang had received a Russian order. That man was always rising in the favour of the Fates, while he himself always fell. And what about the bomb he had so long been threatened with?

He did not find it easier to sleep after this. Up on the heights his enemy holds high festival in the golden halls. What victories have you won, general? Oh, I crushed a fellow officer. Well done! Here is an order. And where is Captain Riis? He is in chains in the cellar, and his children—well. And the captain turned in bed, and looked out into the darkness, and raved.

Finally he rose one day with unusual energy, and with compressed lips began to turn over some papers; but when the little packet of yellow documents lay upon the writing-table before him, they seemed to have shrunk into something that would not bear the light of day. As long as they lay in the drawer, they had seemed to him a bomb, but now!

And yet he brushed his faded frock-coat, smoothed his worn silk hat, and walked with fixed gaze and eager steps down town to the

office of his beloved "Morning Paper." He felt it like a visit to a doctor about suffering that had gone on for years and could no longer be borne.

An hour later he came up again, with heavy steps and taking side streets. The editor had refused him; the subject was too old and doubtful, and was no longer of interest.

Out in the streets the life was gay and the sun shone, and people laughed and ran on, and everything seemed to taunt him with the words: "Do you think the world has nothing to do but listen to your nonsense?" Captain Riis compressed his lips and walked on, trying to hold himself erect. The worst of it was that he felt an enemy within himself. It was a feeling of shame. Every one could see that he was a hero who had wanted to denounce a fellow-officer, but had been refused.

When Astrid came home, she found her father in bed, and for the next few days his temper was trying. What he ate and drank tasted ill, his bed was badly made, the room was too dark or it was too light, Astrid was

in his room too much, but as soon as she left it he rang the bell again.

One day, on her way home from the office, she met Dr. Holth.

"Why, this is really a discovery!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been all this time, Fröken Riis?"

She really enjoyed walking with him, not only because it recalled the merry Easter party, but because he talked in just as interesting a way now as when he taught art-history and Norwegian at her school. She had raved about him then, and he was still surrounded by a kind of halo of all the beautiful ideas he had put before his pupils.

They went up the palace hill under the green trees, and though she ought to have hurried, they walked slowly.

"Do you know, Fröken Riis, that no town is more beautiful than our beloved capital just now? It's not the building, oh, dear no! Nor the hills, nor the fjord, nor the long evenings. No, it's the young girls. When they come out of the offices and shops at dinner-time, and stream up through the

town, they are like perpetual summer. Their faces have felt the first breath of the sun, their eyes are full of expectation of an expedition or a meeting, and they set off, so simply dressed, but glowing with health and good spirits. Isn't it strange that I see it this year for the first time? If only I were a poet and could write a hymn to the young Norwegian girl! But here I am walking with one of them, and though life is full of misery, your being here and looking at me a little and listening to me compensates for a good deal."

She blushed and smiled. "Why, it's much more fun for me to walk with and listen to you!"

"Really? Then we can walk up together another time."

And now she was joined by Dr. Holth on her way home nearly every day. She did not consider much whether it was chance or not, but to listen to him was like taking journeys into distant regions. His voice was feeling, his words so earnest. It was now the only diversion in her long day, and when she

parted from him, it was to go into a dismal backyard flat, where poverty and tribulation sat waiting on every chair.

Her father was up again, now standing for a moment at his drawing-table, and the next being struck with a good idea for his army-organisation plan, and going to another table to make a note of it. The first was duty work, the second the little spark of hope that still kept him up. Oh, there was still a slight possibility of redress; the thing was to hold out.

Astrid came in from her conversation with Holth in such good spirits that she herself suggested that her father should read aloud to her again. He read for hours, and she sat and listened with a strange far-away look in her eyes, but always impatient to hear more. She had so much to make up to him.

Holth lent her an illustrated history of art, and she lay and read it at night in bed. Again it was like travelling in regions where everything was brighter and richer than here. Some of it she did not understand, and she

looked forward to her next meeting with Holth, when she could ask him about it.

But many of the pictures resembled Reidar Bang. She found him as a condottiere on horseback; he was a Greek statue, the Roman Cæsar; and at last she threw down the book in vexation. She began to think more than ever of her mother. Why did her father mention her so seldom? There must have been something wrong about her, too. In her room there hung a faded photograph of a young woman in a white dress and with a bright smile. That was what she was like. What had the days been like for her, and why did she die so early? Had she, too, had a sunless home to toil in? Was she, too, chained to some one who only thought of himself? Perhaps she too had to steal away to the pleasure she was to have, and then one day conscience had said "Stop!" and her duties began. And then she died. Yes, then she died.

A strange time began for Astrid now. This mother of hers began to be so real; she felt her beside her when she was tired; she

sided with her when her father was unreasonable; and when she lay despondent in her bed and shed tears, that bright picture on the wall smiled at her until she felt a desire to fold her hands and pray to her.

She knew very little about this woman, and she did not notice that she endowed her with her own secret wishes; but it was not so hard to think a little defiantly about her father, or to long for a game of tennis, when her mother always took her part.

One day at supper she said: "Father, do you know today I saw a son of General Bang."

"Did you really? Well, *he* must have been a fine gentleman!"

"He was awful!" she said. "A conceited dandy! They say he rides well and is clever at *ski*-ing, but in other respects he's rather wanting in intelligence."

"Where did you have the honour of making the gentleman's acquaintance?" asked the old man, raising his red-rimmed eyes.

She was afraid of blushing, but answered quietly: "He came into the office. My

principal seems to have business transactions with him."

Thank goodness, she managed that alright! But the fresh untruth was like giving her old father a blow in the face. How could she—those hollow cheeks and sleepless eyes! Never again, never again!

To cheer him she went on after a little: "Father, you once said that the bomb was soon going to explode, didn't you?"

"Oh yes, yes," he answered peevishly. "Of course it's going to explode all in good time! Just don't you meddle!"

Afterwards Astrid felt very uncomfortable because she had also told an untruth about Reidar Bang. He wasn't conceited, and he wasn't a dandy at all. It wasn't true.

Nevertheless it was not long before she again cheered the old man by saying something unkind about the general's son. People said he was dreadful to his work-people, and he would willingly risk his whole fortune to crush a rival. That was what he was like. Yes, he took after his father.

Afterwards she was ashamed of herself

again, for Reidar was very good to his work-people, and ready to help his brother-merchants. She had said what was not true.

But a strange desire was always impelling her to bring him into the conversation, and then she would say something bad about him rather than not mention his name.

One evening she lay as usual, looking at the bright portrait over there on the wall, when a thought came into her head, so foolish and impossible that she could not help laughing. Supposing she were some day to become fond of Reidar and appeared before her father to say she was going to marry a son of General Bang. Heavens! Her father would either have a fit, or send her flying down the stairs!

“But what would you say, mother?” she suddenly asked, looking towards the picture. And the bright woman over there answered: “First of all, be happy! The old have no right to stand in your way.”

She turned to the wall, and drew the clothes over her head. If Reidar knew the bad things she had said of him! Oh well, she

didn't care! And she turned over again and tried to sleep.

How pleading and humble he was when he stood with his hat in his hand on the tennis-ground asking if he might see her home, and her answer had been like a slap in the face. And what had she not said to him that time—and that time—and that time!

She didn't care! Now she would be betraying her father in this too. Now she would begin to like Reidar, you would see! No, never, never! There are limits to everything.

But people say he is so good to his mother, and his grandmother worships him. He looks well after his work-people too. They say he has a big library and beautiful paintings in his home. What was it you said to him that time—and that—and that?

One night she sprang up, half asleep, and cried out: "Mother, help me! Don't you see how he haunts me?"

One afternoon she was ironing in the kitchen when there came a knock at the back door. When she opened it, Inga Bang ap-

peared, breathless and rosy, but pretty in her new summer dress.

"What in the world has become of you, you naughty girl! Thank goodness I've found you at last!" And she came in, though Astrid would have liked to ask her to go again. They had been friends for a couple of years, but until now Inga had never been allowed to come up. It was not only for the captain's sake, but Astrid was ashamed for her to see their rooms.

"Well, you can see I'm the maid," she said, pointing to the spots on her kitchen-apron.

"We thought you must be ill," said the other. "But to be a maid—why, that's only jolly."

"You think it's jolly, do you?"

"Of course. I'm going to be one myself soon."

"What?"

"And such a tiny kitchen, and so few things on the walls—oh, it's splendid!" The young girl was charmed with the barely furnished kitchen. "That's just how we shall have it. Oh, it will be fun!"

"Really today you're speaking in riddles. Did you say you were going to have a kitchen like this?"

"Exactly like it, Astrid. I'm going to get married soon, you see, and Henrik earns only two hundred kroner a month, and he swears that no one shall help us with a far-thing and I quite agree with him. But we shan't be able to afford a servant, you see, so I shall have to do everything myself, and that'll be fun. Tell me, isn't it awfully jolly to cook and wash up?"

Astrid had first of all to kiss her friend and congratulate her. "I did have a suspicion of it," she said, "but are you really going to be married soon?"

"Oh yes, why should we wait? Henrik is busy making the furniture, for he wants to do everything himself. And every time we go for a walk, we go and look at flats. Three rooms and a kitchen in the meantime. You don't know how splendid it is!"

Astrid looked at this pretty, spoiled daughter of wealthy parents, who had never needed to put her hand to anything. She talked

about cooking and running the house for almost nothing, as if it were a dance or a *skiing* expedition with her fiancé.

"Now, Astrid, you must really teach me how to save, for I've no idea how to do it. Do you think one box of matches a week will be enough? I'm calculating all day long, but I must make some of the items less. Is half a krone a week for soft soap too much? Fancy! I shall wash my husband's shirts myself! Won't it be fun?"

Astrid smiled, but sighed. "Oh yes, perhaps it'll be fun when it's for your husband."

"How much meat shall we need a month? But I expect you can live cheaper on fish, and really meat is not very necessary, is it?"

Astrid did not want to discourage her, but she looked at the young girl, standing there pretty and cheerful, full of a desire to work and save for the man she loved. And she herself?

"Sit down now, and take a cup of tea with me out here in the kitchen," she said. "I can't ask you in unfortunately."

Inga gathered up her dress and sat down,

her gloved hand resting on the handle of her sunshade. The white veil on her straw hat waved about her rosy face and dark hair, her arching eyebrows and sparkling eyes.

“And there’s one more thing that you really must do for me. You must engage me as your servant for a few hours every day. No, don’t laugh, for I’m in earnest. I’ll come here and learn to make a nice dinner out of little things, and I’ll wash floors, and mend and iron and do the shopping, and you can slap my fingers and scold when I’m stupid. At home mother won’t let me, you know, nor father either; but I will, I will learn it all thoroughly before we start house-keeping. Won’t you do this for me?”

Astrid was busy with the tea over the fire, and said: “I think you’re quite mad today, Inga. Did you come here to make fun of me?”

“To make fun of you! Why it’s you, I should say, who are conceited because you’re so much cleverer. You don’t know how people admire you and talk about you, as if you

were a perfect saint. Because, you know, it's leaked out how splendid you are."

"Who talks about me?" said Astrid, turning to her companion.

"You should hear my brother Reidar, the woman-hater. You've tamed him thoroughly. He asks after you a dozen times in an hour, and I think he has a wild idea of coming up to the kitchen here to find you."

Astrid turned away to the range and said: "I think he'd better not try that."

Inga laughed. "Better not try! And you think! Do you think he cares what you think, or what's proper? Oh, no, if one day he considers it's right, he'll come, and if you fasten the door he'll put his shoulder against it and break it in. He's a man who does what he likes, so make no mistake. But I say, you don't really mean you're not coming the day after tomorrow?"

"Yes, I do. I have a mind of my own too, and I don't intend to come."

Astrid poured out the tea, and the two girls sat at the kitchen dresser while they drank it.

Inga grew more and more eager. Why wouldn't she come and have a little fun?

"Let's change the subject."

"Don't you like Reidar?"

"That's a pretty dress you've got on."

"Tell me honestly now—do you think he's so bad? You should just know who it really is he's making all this fuss for."

Astrid looked at Inga. "Who it's for?" she said tonelessly.

"Yes. Do you think it's like him to get together so many people at his house, and engage a whole orchestra and decorate and turn everything topsy turvy just for one evening—he who likes nothing better than lying alone and drifting in a sailing-boat."

"I don't understand what you mean," said Astrid, looking towards the window. "Besides, I haven't a dress."

"That's capital!" said the other, jumping up in delight.

"What! Is it capital that I haven't a dress?"

"Yes, for then we'll make one, of course. You can understand that I shall have to make

my own dresses hereafter, and so I've been learning a little cutting out. We'll set about it at once. Have you got the stuff?"

"I see you're quite mad today. No, I haven't the stuff, either."

"Then we'll go out and buy it. Have you any money? If not——"

"Yes, yes, set your mind at rest. I've money enough for quite a cheap summer dress."

"All right, then put on your things."

Inga had come like a breath of fresh air from all that Astrid secretly longed for; and without quite realising it, she dressed and found herself on the way downstairs to go out and buy a dress-material. She had to have it in any case. She was not going to the merrymaking. Nothing would induce her!

At supper, the old captain made no objection to Astrid's having a dressmaker in the house. "It's a good thing if you can afford anything of the sort," he said with a sigh.

"Well, father," she said, "I've saved a

little this month by washing the floors and stairs myself."

"Very well, child, I've nothing to say against it. But isn't the dressmaker going to have any supper?"

"Yes, she's having it in the kitchen."

There was a great deal of whispering between the two girls later in the evening. They cut out, they tacked, they tried on again and again, and the sewing-machine hummed. But suddenly a well-known footstep was heard, and Astrid's heart stood still. The door opened and the captain stood on the threshold. Inga jumped up and curtsayed.

"Fröken Isaken," said Astrid by way of introduction, and saved the situation. Inga had quite forgotten the part she was to play, and was about to correct the name, but felt a foot upon her own. The captain saw his coming had disturbed them, and smilingly withdrew. When he was gone, both the girls drew a breath of relief.

When Inga finally went, she had obtained leave to come again and act as servant. All

that was needed was to prepare the old man, and it would be all right.

During the night, the half-finished dress on the chair seemed to become alive. Astrid thought her mother came and put it on. "Look, my daughter! I was once beautiful too. You are beautiful now. Festivities were held for me too in the long summer evenings; but then I was put into fetters, and at last I could do no more. Take care, child! You are only young once; don't waste your best days; one day it will be too late."

The following evening Inga could not come and help her, for Reidar wanted her out at his house. "Thank goodness!" thought Astrid. "Then the dress won't be ready, and that can be my excuse."

And yet after supper she could not settle to anything else, neither needlework nor a book; and almost without her will, the sewing-machine began to hum, and the hours passed. The red summer evening sky glowed above the house-roofs outside, and flooded her hair and face with a golden light, while her hands worked and her thoughts flew far.

At last there was nothing left to do but to sew the buttons on, and that she would not do. And yet her hands began to sew them on.

Her father was probably lying awake thinking melancholy thoughts, while she—what was she doing? Every stitch seemed like treachery, and suddenly her hands dropped in her lap. Why was she doing this? And for the first time her eyes were opened to the fact that lately whenever she had had dreams of freedom and youth, she had involuntarily thought of Reidar Bang. Her brightest hopes had apparelled themselves in his form—and why? Why? It was as though he stood upon the other side of an abyss and beckoned. “Come here! There is everything here that you long for. Only come! Dare the leap, even if you have to set your foot upon your father!”

She wanted to sew, but her fingers trembled. She looked imploringly up at the bright picture on the wall, and it smiled encouragement at her. There was only one more button now, and for Reidar’s sake she might as

well sew it on; and her very hands tingled with joy, as if it were her wedding-dress she was working at, and then with fear, as if she were stitching at her father's shroud.

When at last the dress was finished, she threw herself upon the bed and buried her face in the pillow.

VIII

It was true midsummer weather in the Kristiania valley, with pale blue haze and the air so still that the sailing boats on the fjord seemed to be hovering motionless above rosy clouds and brown hillsides. Flags were flying over the town, upon the hills around, over the forest of masts in the harbour, and over Reidar Bang's house on Bygdö Island, where the fir-wood stretched green arches down to the fjord.

Indoors Inga was carrying on a reign of terror among the maids, in preparation for the arrival of the guests. Reidar himself was walking on the shore, bareheaded and in smoking-jacket, glancing now and again at Paul Tangen, who walked beside him. He felt desperate, for here was he in a state of anxiety as to whether a certain little girl were coming or not! "You're becoming a weakling!" he said to himself. "You once ventured to defy your father and leave the

military college. You didn't go home afterwards, but went on board an emigrant-ship, and many of your experiences in Klondyke are worthy of a man. But now—now you can't sleep at night because—hff!”

He felt as if something cowardly had begun to steal round him, and what he had to do was to get rid of it. If the girl did not come, he would hold high festival this evening, treat every one to champagne, pour paraffin on the big wood-stack down on the rocks, so that his Midsummer Eve bonfire should be talked about. Did she think she could spoil his party then?

“Will you do me a service by letting yourself go tonight?” he said to Tangen.

“Yes, by the gods I will!”

But Paul Tangen was pale, and inwardly he was feeling far from gay. With his usual carelessness in money-matters he had recently fallen into the hands of money-lenders, and several hopes of selling pictures had been disappointed. He would never think of asking his wealthy friend for assistance, and now his home must be put up for auction.

Well, to move into the country and begin a new struggle with poverty did not frighten him exactly; but when he got his head above water again, he would not be young any longer. The gay light-hearted years of which he had had no experience until he was nearing forty, were probably over now and would never come again. He was holding festival this evening for the last time; but even his wife did not know it yet, for he wanted her to have a cloudless Midsummer Eve.

"I'm not well," said Reidar, looking philosophically into the distance.

"No, I've noticed it!"

"What! Have you really noticed it?"

"Who could help it?" Tangen answered, talking as if he himself was free from care and therefore able to enter into his friend's troubles. "Through the latter part of the spring you've not been yourself at all. I don't allude to your having given up dumb-bells and cold water, and taken to medicine before and after meals. No, you've become so full of feeling, my friend. This year you've tended your flowers with your own

hand; you've taken to keeping pigeons and a canary; and your handkerchiefs are so perfumed that the wasps fly after you, thinking you're a flower. There's something the matter with him, I've said——"

"You're a confounded idiot," cried Reidar, giving him a push so that he fell into an apple-tree. "And besides, you're mistaken, because the fact is I'm studying a subject for a novel!"

"What!" exclaimed Tangen, who was once more at his side. "What are you studying, did you say?"

"You can make as much fun of me as you like, but I've often said, most of what's written in novels is nonsense from beginning to end. Love, for instance, doesn't begin with sighs and moonlight. Oh, no! I will suppose a man at first despises a girl, and thinks her stupid and ugly, but then—this is only a supposed case—then one day he sees her changing her shoes and discovers a little hole in the heel of her stocking."

"Aha!" said the artist. "And what then?"

"What then? Why this poor little heel

keeps coming into his mind after that, and he also remembers that her hands are red, and a desire comes upon him to take her into his arms and carry her away into a brighter world. He approaches her, but she mistrusts him; he humbles himself, but she answers him with flashing eyes. And he—he swears he'll have nothing to do with her; but he can't do it, and it's all the fault of that confounded stocking-heel. Yes, that's how love can begin, or rather that's how a sensible man loses his head. No, you're quite right; one ought to punch misfortune's head, and give a party to defy it."

At that moment a motor-car stopped at the garden gate, and the two men hastened towards it. It was the general with his wife and daughter, Fru Captain Ramm, and youngest son the engineer. Inga was instantly on the spot as hostess, still warm with all she had done, in a pale yellow muslin frock with a wide lace collar and yellow flowers in her dark hair. The general looked at her for a moment, and then stooped and kissed her hand.

"Are you pleased with me, father?"

"Come here, Inga," called Fru Bang, who was already on the verandah. She did not approve of her husband's manner of treating his daughters.

"This evening we're going to dance ourselves happy and mad again," said Paul Tangen to Fru Ramm.

"Yes, you others," she replied with a faint smile, as she put up her parasol.

She was dressed in white, and wore a white hat with a large black ostrich feather; and of late her almost too round rosy face had acquired a shade of melancholy that made her prettier than before.

"You're never to be seen now," he said lightly, to which she replied with a bitter smile and turned away.

The garden gate opened again, and Inga and Reidar were kept busy in their capacity of hostess and host. Light dresses and uniforms sailed in among dark clothes, and now and then a pair of striped trousers beneath a long coat. There were engineers, come from railways that were being laid through

forest and over mountain, as brown as Indians, busy city men who had only just had time to go home and change. Then came a sunburnt arctic traveller, then a couple of barristers and a young diplomat, and lastly a forty-year-old industrial king, plump and smiling, between a Danish prima donna and a famous singer. They kept on coming, mostly young people old enough to have made a position, but still with sufficient absence from care to make a night of it.

"Glad to see you, Louisa," said Inga to a young girl in red with a plait down her back. "And you too, Ida. Oh, how pretty your dress is!"

The white house stood in the middle of a large garden, which sloped down to the fjord with fir wood on either side. It was soon a lively scene under the green trees, where the guests gathered in groups, talking and laughing. There was a gentle breeze coming in from the fjord, bearing the scent of seaweed and pines; and the gentle splash of the waves upon the shore mingled with the rustling of the tree-tops and the merry voices.

“Do you see how stylish our ladies are beginning to be?” said Tangen to Dr. Holth, who was wandering about looking for Astrid Riis. “And there’s that young engineer Bang pretending to be nothing but a dandy, while without his father’s knowledge he’s made a bold move and bought a waterfall and formed a company, and is going to build a factory. Beware of men nowadays who press their trousers carefully; there’s something in them.”

Suddenly the artist started as he saw Hjorth enter with his young wife. Since the Easter outing he had been violently attracted by this beautiful woman, but he might just as well have expected to catch a salmon with his hands. And yet it had been an exciting game when she alternately hid herself and enticed him, always gliding away whenever he thought he had triumphed. And now she was coming towards him dressed in pink as light as air, which dimly revealed the curves of her figure. Her yellow straw hat was worn a little off her face, which, framed by her dark hair, shone out as from a glory. Young, slender and yet of rounded

form, she moved forward with nods and smiles to all sides.

"How do you do, Wilhelmine?" came from every quarter. "How do you do, Hjorth?"

As Tangen took her hand, he had the feeling that it was for the last time; and when she noticed that his hand trembled, she dropped her eyes.

"I'm going away very soon," he said in a low voice.

"For a long time?" She also spoke in an undertone.

"For some years."

"Isn't your wife here?" she asked loud enough for all to hear, as she passed on; but that she lowered her voice to say something to him made his pulses beat. Why? Did he expect anything from it? No; and yet—and yet——

"It's nine o'clock," said Fru Bang to Reidar. "We must have supper." But he still stood looking towards the gate as if he expected others.

"Just a moment!" he said.

But then the general came up and said he

was hungry, and again Reidar looked through the trees, hoping to catch sight of a white dress; but the trees stood bathed in the rosy evening light, and there was no one to be seen.

At last Inga came out on the verandah and clapped her hands to call the guests to supper; and one after another the couples passed up through the garden and into the house. The tennis-court, which lay behind the red stable-building, was boarded over so that they could dance upon it, and a band of musicians was already on the ground tuning up.

In the meantime Astrid had passed a strange day. In the office she had entered amounts in the wrong books, and later when she was on her way home, every one seemed to her to be in high spirits, ready to dance out of doors. When finally she entered her little kitchen, it seemed so dark, so poor, so comfortless, that she sank into a chair with her hands in her lap.

But dinner had to be prepared, and as she stood over the fire, with the smoke in her

face and soot on her hands, she was thinking of the blue sky and fresh green trees as a thirsty man thinks of water. And she seemed to hear her mother say to her: "Go to the party, child! You've earned a little amusement."

Astrid opened the window to the yard, but instead of fresh air there streamed in the stench of backyard air, and she had to shut it again. "Yes," she said to herself, "I'll go! I can't help it; I must go!"

But at dinner-time she thought she had never seen her father look so old. It seemed to her that if she went to Reidar's party this evening, something extraordinary would happen. Her father was in good spirits because he had finished part of his army-reorganisation plan; and his poor little hope of obtaining satisfaction so touched her now that her food seemed to choke her. Could she deceive him again this evening? She turned her eyes to the sitting-room and everything in it seemed to say: "Of course you can go if you like and become the wife of a rich mer-

chant, but we—everything in here—we won't desert your father."

"You're not eating, child," said the captain.

"It's so hot in here," she said.

Later in the afternoon she lay down for a little while on her bed. The picture on the wall seemed to talk and talk, and she drew the sheet over her face so as to think of something else. But it was really so hot, and the flies were so disagreeable, and she felt in her body a thirst for fresh air and happy movement, laughter and a high, blue sky. Oh, if she only could!

Suddenly she got up, and a little while after went quietly in to the old man, who was once more sitting at his work.

"Read me something," she said with the look of one who is paying dearly for something. The captain polished his glasses, and adjusted them upon his red nose, and began to read from the written sheets. It took a long time, and the room was very close. When at last he ended, she had heard it all and began to discuss it with him. At last she

mentioned the general. How this would make him smart when it came out. After that she spoke ill of Reidar, and Inga, a daughter of the general, whom she had now also met. It was a terrible family! Astrid racked her brains to think of something more to say; she would spare nothing in order to pay dearly for this evening.

When she rose, she looked about her with a feeling that something was over now.

After supper she said she would go for a walk. "That's right!" said her father, charmed and happy over all the pleasure she had given him that day. "Do go for a walk, child!"

She put on her white dress, and fastened her locket round her neck. She would not hide it from him today.

As she stood looking at herself in the mirror, the thought of this dress filled her with terror. She had washed stairs in order to be able to afford it, and while she sewed at it, she had been working herself stitch by stitch away from her father and over to—well, to whom? And without knowing what she did,

she examined all the folds of the dress, as if she expected to find an ugly stain.

In her white hat, which she had made herself out of plaited paper, and with mittens drawn up over her red arms, she hurried through the town; and when she reached the quays where the wide heavens, the fjord and the wooded hills were spread out before her, she felt as if she must stretch out her arms and cry aloud. The fjord was swarming with little steamers hurring in to and out from the quays; the sun had gone down, and the bonfires were lighted, their yellow flames burning brightly along both shores, out on the islands, and up among the blue hills.

When she had crossed the bay on the steamer and was making her way through the wood, her nostrils quivered and she drew deep breaths of the warm pin-scented air, while her movements resembled those of a young deer. She passed a number of people seated among the trees, riders, open-air restaurants, and house after house; but she asked her way, and hastened on in the direction indicated. The pine-needles under her feet were warm and

crackled gaily, and all was fresh and bright, and home nothing but a dream. She smelt the salt from the sea and stopped to drink it in. Where was she going? What was she doing? Well, she must go on.

"There she is!" cried Inga, coming out flushed with dancing. "Who?" asked Reidar, who had also just finished a dance. "Look for yourself!"

Yes, there she was, stealing along cautiously, as if ready at any moment to turn and fly, the red light through the trees flecking her white dress and hat, her face flushed with warmth or shyness; but she drew nearer and nearer.

"Is that you at last, you bad person!" cried Inga, running towards her.

After supper Reidar's guests had stood for some time in groups round the bonfire on the beach, and dancing had only just begun; and Paul Tangen now led Fru Hjorth on to the floor to dance the first waltz.

"You said you were going away," she whispered, as they swung round in the merry throng.

"It's necessary unfortunately."

"Why?"

"Don't ask me."

She understood that some misfortune was at the bottom of it. And it seemed to him that she all at once leaned more heavily on his arm, as she bent back and gathered up her dress in one hand. Paul Tangen never forgot that dance. She seemed in farewell to breathe out the whole of her youth over him; above them was the blue sky, and he drank in the perfume of her hair with the scent of the pines, while the rustle of her pink dress mingled with the splash of the waves. He was swept away by it all in a feeling of happiness as great as if it were the young summer itself he held in his embrace.

"How can you close your eyes when there is such a glorious sky above you?" he said.

She answered with a little glance through her long eyelashes. "Do you think my sky is any less beautiful than yours?"

"Then I'll see it too," he said and closed his eyes. And it seemed to him that they melted together into a single warm wave, borne along

by the long, divine rhythm which is both pain and pleasure, which trembles in everything that lives and dies, from the worm to the planets, which is the mystery of light and sound, and perhaps the origin of the universe.

"Shall we stop? Are you tired?"

"No, no!" she whispered.

The big tennis-ground was one whirl of light dresses and tall men, and warm, breathless couples were continually resorting to the long table by the garden fence, where young girls in white caps stood and served refreshments.

The general had of course danced until he was quite warm, and as he stood by the table drinking soda water, the arctic explorer came up with Fru Tangen to look for a glass.

"Well, sir," said the general, "I suppose you've seen polar bears dancing at the north pole?"

"Not polar bears," said the weatherbeaten man with a smile, "but seals. They now and then have a wedding at the edge of the ice, and tumble about and yell like drunken peasants in olden days."

The general turned to watch Reidar, who was leading out Astrid Riis to dance. They swung in among the others, she hanging yieldingly upon his arm, as though she had drifted here against her will, and was now being swept away in a joy so sinful that she had to hide her face.

Reider would have been perfectly happy now that she was here at last, if he had not been trembling with anxiety over what was soon to happen. He was very careful that she should get no bumps in the crush, and in a little while began in a whisper: "Why——" But she instantly pressed his hand and said: "Don't ask!" It seemed to him that in saying this she had put her arms round his neck, and he smiled down into her face so kindly that she smiled back at him. The soft rhythm of the dance felt like something motherly that took them into its embrace to prevent anything fateful happening to them yet.

Flushed with warmth, the couples began to take little walks through the garden, fanning their hot faces with fans and handkerchiefs, while laughter and happy talk sounded out in

the pale blue night. Down on the beach, the tar-barrel still sent up smoke and fire as if in greeting to its comrades flaming far, far off; and the gentle breeze on the fjord had dropped again, so that the white-sailed yachts seemed to stand up out of the deep sky of the sea itself.

When Paul Tangen had given up Fru Hjorth to another partner, he had no desire to dance any more. He wandered alone along the shore and looked across at the sleeping town on the other side of the bay, where towers and church-spires rose out of the copper-hued haze.

"It'll have to be work after this," he said to himself. "And what does it matter? And poverty and toil for a few miserable shillings, and doing without things—but what does that matter either?"

"Oh, is that you?" said a voice, and his brother came up and joined him. "Isn't it splendid here? Do you know what I've thought of?" And Paul was told about a modern temple, its roof borne up by columns which were to be statues of great men. In its bright

halls youth should hold festival, generation after generation, while the nation's famous men, one after another, were immortalised as pillars of the temple of youth.

"Be quiet!" said Paul. "You're in love, you know."

"Don't you ever think how sad it is that one can't keep any part of an evening like this? Just think that all this symphony of colour, rhythm and happy cries is over and gone past recall tomorrow!" And the young man's chin was pushed out in a melancholy smile.

"Life is extravagant and can afford to be wasteful, my friend." And at that moment catching sight of his wife, he hastened up to her and asked for a dance.

"Fancy!" she said. "Have you really recollected my existence?"

"Oh, don't suppose I haven't seen how you've been making up to the arctic explorer this evening! You've made me quite jealous!"

And the frivolous man danced with this woman, who was the only one he would care to have married, and to whom he always re-

turned. He would soon have to tell her of the trouble that had come upon them, that they would have to give up all the pretty things they had got together, and become poor people in an attic again.

"How beautiful you are this evening!" he whispered with a sad smile. "Do you remember it was an evening like this when we got engaged?"

She raised her beautiful brown eyes to him, and looked pleased; and the dance seemed to sweep away the intervening years and they were engaged afresh.

When Reidar finished his dance with Astrid, he meant to take her a little way off, and she understood this and looked about for help. It came in the shape of the general asking for a dance, and Reidar found himself standing alone once more.

And Astrid was dancing with her father's deadly enemy! His arm was about her waist, and he was saying nice things to her about her dress. She was glad she had escaped having to go with Reidar, for goodness knows

what would have happened if she had done; but was this any better?

"You dance just as delightfully as your mother," said the general, charmed. "She was a regular open-air creature. A poet once called her a daughter of the sun and the wind."

"Did you know my mother?"

His answer, after a short pause, "Yes, indeed I did," was said in such a manner that it sent a cold shiver down her back. What had there been between the general and her mother? She had to go on dancing, but would have liked to tear herself away and fly.

When at last they left the floor, Holth was standing by and fortunately asked her for a dance; but before they entered the whirl, she whispered: "Will you see me home? But don't tell any one."

Reidar had wandered excitedly up and down in the garden, waiting for Astrid to be disengaged; but as he once more approached the dancing-ground, Fru Ramm came up to him and said: "Fröken Riis asked me to say good-by to you. She had to go home to her father, and Holth went with her."

"What! Oh well, that's capital!" said Reidar, bursting into a laugh.

A little later some one shouted "Hurrah!" as large baskets of champagne were seen being carried from the verandah over to the long table under the trees.

"Look! Look!" came from all sides. "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

And at the same time a monster flame sprang up from the beach, as a match was put to the wood-stack over which paraffin had been poured. A couple who had been sitting behind a bush down there, rushed out as if the unexpected light had caught them doing something wrong. The huge bonfire threatened to destroy the fir-trees close by, which it dyed red; and showers of sparks were thrown up higher than the flames before they fell. The whole garden became red, and faces and dresses; the house became red, and smoke and flame were mirrored in the smooth water of the fjord.

There was a report at the table, and Reidar suddenly got upon a bench with a foaming glass held above his red head, and made a

speech in honour of pleasure. White arms raised glasses, healths were drunk, and cheers given. It was the signal for a regular outbreak of jollity. The rotund industrial king stood on a table in the centre of a group of ladies, and proposed the health of their host. Then it was the general himself who managed to get up on to something or other to extol woman; and before he knew where he was, he was seized by young girls and carried in triumph round the ground.

There was a continual popping of corks, and the garden was soon a scene of wild confusion. People danced wherever they could, without looking what they were trampling upon; women fled away screaming, followed by their partners; couples strayed along the shore, looking into one another's eyes and whispering; and the great tall forester, the general's eldest son, suddenly appeared with his wife struggling in his arms, and said he was going to throw her into the water because she was unfaithful.

In a few minutes the stableman, by his master's order, had mowed down all the flowers

in the beds, and Reidar went about with a huge basket scattering red, yellow and white flowers over women and men, crying: "Adorn yourselves! Adorn yourselves!"

"Dear me, is that why you've been gardening so industriously this summer," said Fru Ramm.

"Yes," answered Reidar, with a forced laugh. "Yes, of course, that was why. Here, good people, adorn yourselves! And why aren't you drinking?"

The arctic explorer and Harald Bang came up to him arm in arm. "He doesn't think I can swim out to that little island there!" said Harald.

"Well, then, you can show him you can at once," said Reidar. "I could do it and empty a bottle on the way."

"So could I," said Paul Tangen, who came up just then.

The bonfire had now burnt low, and was nothing but ashes and smoke; but from behind the hills in the east rose flames from the dawning day.

The general went home, but the young peo-

ple were invited to breakfast out on the little island; and soon four boats put out from the land, adorned with green branches, and with the band in the first. Reidar, Harald, Paul Tangen and the arctic explorer were to follow immediately.

The red fjord was as smooth as glass. A couple of yachts lay with flapping sails as if they slept, and as the merry party glided past a loaded sloop, they noticed the fresh smell of newly-baked bread.

“Oh look! Look!”

It was four swimmers who shot out from a promontory a little way from Reidar’s house, and headed with even strokes for the island.

“Goodness!” cried the Danish prima donna. “Who are those crazy people? Fancy if they were to drown!”

It was easy to see who they were, and the band immediately struck up. The boats drew nearer so as to be at hand if required; and suddenly the sun shot up, casting its ruddy light upon the four heads rising out of the water.

“Hullo!” cried Reidar. “We’re going to

drink to your health!" And the bodies of four men came into view as they stood treading water with the sun shining red upon their wet skin. "Your health!" And Reidar held up a bottle of champagne, made the cork fly, and put it to his mouth, after which it went the round of the others.

"Bravo! Bravo!" shouted the rest of the party, and then the green-garlanded boats passed on across the smooth fjord to the accompaniment of music and laughter.

At last they landed upon the little island, the swimmers in a secluded spot, where Henrik Tangen brought them their clothes, which had been brought in one of the boats. A fire was lighted, and soon they were all lying on the grass drinking freshly-made coffee, while the sun rose higher and higher, and the life on the fjord began to awake.

A couple of hours later Reidar sat alone upon his verandah, looking idly at the garden, which was overstrewn with bottles and broken glass, and where the half-withered flowers lay trampled down upon the paths and grass-plots.

For a moment he covered his face with his hands and felt inclined to weep—or laugh scornfully—or sleep—or go far away; but suddenly he raised his head defiantly. “Not for the world!” he said aloud. “I’ll show you that I’m the strongest!”

Then he rose, and instead of going to bed, he changed his clothes and went through some gymnastic exercises; and a moment later he was darting across the red bay to town in his white motor-boat, steering with one hand and trying to peel an orange with the other. The others might sleep if they liked. He was going to the office to work. Was he the master of his own destiny or not?

IX

A COUPLE of days later, Jörgen Holth was on his homeward way in such good spirits that he could not help whistling. He had once more, as if by chance, met Astrid Riis; and when he boldly suggested a walk to Holmenkollen tomorrow evening, she had actually answered yes.

“Ha-ha!” he laughed to himself. “I’m going to hold a tryst at last!”

He was toiling hard at examination-papers just now, and at home, in the heat, it was stuffier than ever. The children worried him to let them go into the country, and Selma’s eyes pleaded for it too; and he had not got a step farther with the two books he was writing. Was courage lacking? Was it too late? No, but when his duties were over in the afternoon, and he sat down at his writing-table, his head was weary and his thoughts were sad. He would sit with his chin resting upon his hand, looking straight before him, and before

he was aware of it he was dreaming of a golden-haired girl. For him she represented the youth that he was never to experience, but of which he nevertheless tried every day to obtain a glimpse. And now tomorrow!

It was the first time he had ever come home with a joy that he was obliged to conceal. At dinner Selma asked: "Has anything happened, Jörgen?" "No, why?" "You look so pleased." Selma, of course, was always expecting that little miracle to happen—the appointment to a headmastership or professorship. Some day, surely, good fortune must knock at their door too!

Next morning she said again: "Were you ill in the night, Jörgen?"

"Ill? I?"

"You were so restless, and got up several times to look out of the window."

This was true. He had spent the night in a childish anxiety lest it should rain, for then she would not meet him, he supposed.

It was a long day at school, and still longer at home. How endless an hour seems when one wants it to pass! How long dinner takes

when the children make messes and dawdle and can never be done! But he kept down his irritability, and played with little Susanna, and gave the eldest boy good advice about his examination the following day; he even listened patiently to Selma's tale of domestic troubles. He could so well afford it now. In an hour—in half-an-hour!

At last he said he had to go to a school-festival, and therefore had to dress. But just as he was going, he stopped involuntarily for a moment, and looked round the rooms where Selma and he had together gone through so much, both evil and good. "Don't go!" a voice within him said. Selma was sitting patching a little pair of trousers, and tired and faded though she was, seemed happy today, because he had been so kind. "Don't go!" But he went. Only this once! Out in the passage, little Susanna came to him and wanted to go too, and in her eagerness clasped her arms round his knees and let herself be dragged along. He never forgot how he had to unclasp her little hands by force, nor her cry as he went down the stairs. What was he doing?

And yet the town had never seemed so beautiful to him before. The people that passed had happy faces, and he felt as if at last, after many years' injustice, he was going to receive restitution.

He sat on a bench at Majorstuen and waited. He prepared something bright and pretty to say to the young girl, and it was like getting rid of book-dust and domestic troubles, and adorning himself with young, fresh colours. Would she not soon be coming.

A barrister and a doctor, both socialists, passed him, and when they saw him and nodded to him, he was quite embarrassed. "Well, why weren't you too at the labour festival at Kampen?" asked the doctor, stopping a moment.

"Examination papers, my friend!" answered Holth, waving them away without knowing he did it. The two gentlemen stepped into the tram and disappeared.

Was she not coming? Even this anxiety was something he positively enjoyed. It was like a breath from earlier years. It was not social sorrow, or pecuniary troubles, or jeal-

ousy of colleagues, but something brighter and purer. Now he thought he saw her, but was disappointed; then he discovered far down the street a hat like hers, but again it was some one else's. Then all at once she was standing in front of him, red and breathless with hurrying.

"Have you been waiting? I couldn't come before."

She was in a light cotton frock, with a leather belt about her waist, and upon her golden hair the white hat of plaited paper. They decided to take the tram to Slemdal, and walk on from there. In the tram they talked about the party on Bygdö, which had been such fun.

When they left the tram, they went with several other people up a road towards the wood, and before long were alone. White and brown houses were just visible through the green trees and firs on both sides, the tall trunks of the fir-trees showed red in the sunlight, and birds flew backwards and forwards above their heads.

"I'm looking forward to hearing about your

work," she said. "Or perhaps you were only making fun of me when you promised to tell me about it."

"Yes, I only said it in fun."

"You consider I'm too stupid, of course."

"Just so; and conceited."

"Thank you!"

They both laughed; the sentences were like chirps. What good friends they were already! It happened that they turned into a path where they were obliged to walk closer together, and soon the trees hung so low over their heads that they often had to stoop.

"I can't be out very long," said Astrid.
"Father's not very well just now."

"Why, we've only just started!"

"How she looks at me!" he thought, remembering his grey hair and ageing face. He must make her see something younger and more beautiful in him. What he was writing? A book on the divine Cæsar Borgia, and he had also planned one on Dante. And just listen how the pope's son, the beautiful bloodhound, really took after the poet of heaven

and hell! His words came so easily, his voice was full and warm.

Was it not a splendid walk? Every time he could tell her about something beautiful, it seemed as if a buried gem were dug out of his memory, and allowed to sparkle in the light again. And he gave it to her, wishing it had all been still more beautiful. Later on they sat down on the heather and while she, with bent head, drew a stalk of grass through her fingers, he lay back with his hands behind his head, and told her about Heloïse and Abelard. High above the tree-tops rose the blue heaven, and he lay there in the wood with a young girl sitting beside him, and was a poet of twenty again.

When at last they stood taking leave of one another down in the town, he pressed her hand respectfully. "Thank you for my first summer evening," he said with a melancholy smile. "I'm wondering whether you'll make me a present of one more." He watched her lips anxiously.

She answered as if to herself: "I've no one

else to go with now. Father always wants to go alone."

"But your friends, Fröken Bang and Reidar and——?"

"Good night!" she said hurriedly, and hastened away.

Thus began a series of excursions in the neighbourhood of the town, which filled Holth's days with the brightest expectations. He had either been promised a new excursion to which he could look forward, or he expected to meet her, as if by chance, at dinner-time, and then propose another. His step grew brisk, his appetite good, and all difficulties seemed surmountable. Now he went about whistling, whether he was going into the town or home.

And he never noticed that the young girl was always like one walking in her sleep, and that she often interrupted with questions that had nothing whatever to do with the subject on which he was discoursing.

X

EVERY time Astrid left home, she had a vague feeling that Holth could give her good advice; but no sooner was she beside him than she felt it impossible. To no one in the world, not even to him, could she venture to speak about this.

She tried to laugh at the suspicion that had taken root within her when she was dancing with the general; but it fitted in so much too well with various insinuations of her father, and she now always had it in her mind.

If there were any truth in it, it would make the gulf between herself and Reidar doubly deep. It was bad enough that the general had ruined her father's career; but now after this to go up to the old man and say, "I love that man's son? Never! She could never do it!"

Her mother's portrait still hung in her room, and at one moment she felt she would like to turn its face to the wall, at another to speak in her defense. This dead woman had

latterly seemed so near her; she had become her inward voice, upon which she relied. But now it was as if she herself had a share in her wrong-doing; and when, at meals, she met her father's red-rimmed eyes, she hung her head as if in shame.

Inga Bang was in earnest about coming as maid-servant, but Astrid, when she came, was so obstinate in her refusal to allow it that Inga was quite offended when she went away. "Well," thought Astrid, "I suppose I've broken with the whole family, so that's all settled and done with."

Hot July came, and people began to go into the country, and the old captain indulged in a little holiday. He smoked an extra pipe, sitting with a map spread out before him, on which he followed the manœuvres as the papers described them. The pins he moved backwards and forwards were soldiers. But suddenly he would push it all away, and spring up, saying: "Nonsense! There's no use in it now!" And he would pace the floor for hours.

Astrid sat with him during the afternoon with her sewing, and beneath her downcast

lids there swarmed a whole world of fancies.

“Were you fond of him, mother—that other one? Couldn’t you help being fond of him?” And in her thoughts she went with this mother to an unlawful tryst; but, strange to say, it was Reidar who came.

A little later she raised her eyes to look at her father as he paced the floor. He might live for another twenty years and she would have to go on living the same life as now, and afterwards end it, she supposed, in the poor-house.

The only brightness in her life now was her meeting with Holth, but often when she left home she tried to imagine that it was Reidar who was waiting for her. Her work had to be done both at the office and at home, but she lived in a kind of twilight in which dream and reality so easily mingled. In the kitchen she often cheered herself with the thought, “I shall meet him again this evening”; and she would dress and even put a little powder on her hands, and then when she saw him—why it was Holth!

After a long absence, her brother one day

knocked at the door when the old man was taking his afternoon nap. When the much worn macintosh was removed, it appeared that he had neither waistcoat nor jacket. He was unshaven and dirty, wore some wrecks of shoes upon his feet, and smelt strongly of spirits.

"Don't look at me like that, confound you! I'm in full dress in my own fashion, and am quite comfortable. How are all my relations?"

"Hush! Don't talk so loud! Where have you been since last you were here?" She could not take her eyes from him, and involuntarily felt for something on which to lean.

"Shall I go?" he said harshly, when he saw the impression he made upon her.

"No, no! You shall have something to eat. But for goodness sake be careful that he doesn't hear you!"

The young man swallowed the food greedily. His long, reddish hair fell over his forehead, and there were blue rings round his eyes. She had given up scolding, beseeching, and helping him long ago.

"And the old man? He must be as com-

fortable as an egg in its shell, now that I'm out of sight."

"He's been going out so much lately, and I think that secretly he's looking for you."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a good one! But I say, do you still hold little conversations with mother? What has she been saying to you lately?"

Astrid turned her head away and made no answer.

"Do you believe the souls of the dead sometimes mix with the living? How is it, for instance, that in many things you're so like mother? Do you remember anything about her?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Do you remember the last time we were with her how she took us by the hand and smiled?"

In a little while Astrid answered in a low voice: "That's just the thing I remember best about her."

"Well, isn't it strange that you've got exactly the same smile? And the way she moved her first finger when she held out her hand to

me, I've since seen in you. How do you explain that?"

Astrid closed her eyes and smiled, and without knowing it moved the first finger of one hand.

"Really and truly, old girl, do you know how mother ended her days?"

Astrid opened her eyes. "Now, Ivar," she said. "You asked me that question some time ago. What is it you're fancying?"

"Fancying! I *know* it! But we wanted to spare you!"

Her eyes grew large, and she involuntarily drew a step nearer. "What! What do you mean?"

Her brother put down his spoon and wiped his mouth with his hand. "Well, as I'm going on a long journey and am not going to take a return ticket, you may as well hear it. You know mother was from Nordland?"

"Yes, of course I know that."

"A sea-bird or a bit of wind and storm! And then to be chained to father! She was out sailing when she ought to have been darn-ing stockings, took air-baths in the coldest

north wind, and played the flute when he whimpered about his small income. Once she knelt at the window worshipping the sun, while other people were going to church."

Astrid leaned against the kitchen dresser again and closed her eyes. Had she heard this before, or dreamt it, or had a desire to do just the same herself?

"How do you know this?"

"From a bankrupt merchant on the west coast, who was once a friend of hers, but afterwards got into prison. A splendid fellow!"

"And didn't she die of inflammation of the lungs?" asked Astrid, again opening her eyes.

"Not she—except officially. There was an illicit love affair, too. The old 'un managed to stifle her soul, but there was a little sinful capacity for adoration left. It ended with her trying to make away with herself when out sailing; but she was dragged ashore and went to bed, and it appeared that—that she—that she was in the family way, as people had been saying already. Shall I go on?"

Without answering, Astrid went to the little

window; but though she gazed out, it was her mother that she saw.

“Well, good-bye! Next time I come I’ll go in and have a farewell settling-up with him. And just take care he doesn’t ruin you, too. A wise man in the East End has said that certain people cast poisonous shadows. Good-bye!”

Astrid heard him go, but still stood motionless with closed eyes. She was living through it with her mother. And once more it seemed to her that she had heard it before or dreamt it, or wished to experience it. She passed her hand across her forehead as if to rouse herself. Her mother’s fate was like a whirlpool into which she was gazing, and she felt as if she must cling tightly to something so as not to be carried away.

The next time Holth saw her coming, he thought how pale she looked, and said he hoped she was not working too hard in this hot weather.

“I?” she said. “No, I’m taking it quite easy now. But today I hunted up an old flute of mother’s, and when father began complain-

ing about expenses, tried to play it. But, by the way, couldn't you manage to get a boat, so that we could go on the water for a change?"

"Why, of course! That would be easy enough. My friend Reidar Bang has several."

Astrid involuntarily stood still and dropped her eyes. "Oh, has he? But whatever you do, don't tell him it's for me."

"No, of course not! You may be quite sure of that."

For that matter it was only delightful that it should be one of Reidar's boats; and the first time she was setting out for a sail, she was once more almost sure it was Reidar who was coming.

It was an evening when there was a windy-grey fjord and an overclouded sky. The sails filled, and she lay in the bottom of the boat and felt she would like to stroke its sides. It rocked her so gently, and bore her as if in a pair of strong arms.

The wind went down, and they lay motionless with flapping sails. Holth began to tell her stories again, and she was carried away by the variety of images; but nevertheless she

said to herself; "I'm sure Reidar is better at telling stories." His voice was just as good, and his hair was not turning grey. No, he was the hero coming through the air on *skis*, a form of splendid strength, having kinship with the moorland and the light. And yet it was she that he loved! Was he suffering now? Should she write to him? She laid her cheek against the side of the boat. There sat Holth, who was something like him. Perhaps his clothes had touched Reidar's this very day. She felt she would like to go and stroke his sleeves with her hand. Then she cunningly turned the conversation as to say something bad about Reidar; and when Holth defended him, felt inclined to kiss him for speaking well of the man she loved.

It was not easy to be Jørgen Holth and sit there quietly while the girl lay so carelessly a few feet from him; but he had always been careful, and it was essential that he should not frighten her and so upset everything. And, besides, what did he want?

Sometimes when he was standing talking to his wife at home, he could not help thinking

of the other's young face, and he would involuntarily brighten up, so that Selma could not help smiling, too. He would kiss her, and imagine to himself that it was the girl he was kissing, and the kiss would be so passionate that the no longer young woman was quite confused. While she sat sewing and patching, he would come and tell her something so beautiful that she could remember nothing like it since the time they were engaged. But then, too, he would sometimes spring up and go away ashamed, saying to himself: "Confound you! You're making use of your own wife to rehearse upon for the other!"

Jörgen Holth began to lead a different life now. He had hitherto been an insatiable newspaper-reader, and now he considered the papers something quite unnecessary. "All that vile stuff shut out both the sun and the stars from me when I was young," he said to himself. "And I've had enough of it." On the other hand he became a particular man, who took a daily bath and rub-down, and always wore clean linen. He felt as if two

young eyes were always fixed upon him, and they must not be disappointed.

One day when he saw his wife busy pressing his trousers, he was strangely moved. "My dear!" he said, putting his arm round her waist. "You ought to let the maid do that."

"You wouldn't care to put them on if I did!"

He kissed her affectionately, but at the same moment thought of the far-off possibility that some day his trousers might be pressed by other hands.

In the meantime he had managed to get together money to send his wife and children into the country, and when he put it into Selma's hand, her eyes grew moist with gratitude. She knew what it must have cost him. There was great rejoicing, too, among the children, and that night Jörgen Holth went to bed with the feelings of a father worshipped by wife and children.

The good spirits in which he always came home now began to exert a peculiar influence upon his wife. She was not quite so tired as before, she began to keep the house in better

order, she found time to dress her hair, and put on a pretty blouse for dinner, and she even now and then sat down at the piano and tried to freshen up her youthful accomplishments.

"There's Jörgen," she said to herself, "working and toiling from morning to night, and I do nothing to make things comfortable for him."

He took care not to mention Astrid's name at home, but when his thoughts of her grew too real, he would often put his arm round his wife's waist, and talk about the brightness and wealth of life.

A few days before they were going into the country, Fru Holth was sitting in the children's room after they had gone to bed. She was fighting a strange battle. She wanted to present her husband with a costly gift, because he had been so good to her; but the gift must unfortunately come from the children as well as herself. There was complaining and whimpering over little shattered childish dreams, but their mother would not give it, and grew more and more eloquent, although tears were running down her own cheeks, too.

The next day, when Holth sat down at the dinner-table, little Susanna came up to him and gave him an envelope, saying as she did so: "We don't want to go into the country, father. You have so little money, and we can go another time."

"What nonsense is this?" he said, lifting his head and looking at them all. Selma's face was radiant, and the children smiled a little shyly, and at last he understood. And he remembered how on the way home he had been wondering how he could manage to make some sort of present to Astrid Riis. And now here was the money! The envelope began to tremble in his hand, and a lump rose in his throat. He kissed the little girl, and said thank you; but to himself he said: "Of course, they shall go to the country! I'll give the money to Selma this evening."

That day he was going to meet Astrid, and before he left home he sat for a long time in his study with his head in his hands, engaged in an inward struggle. "I won't! I won't! I'll stay at home with Selma and the children."

But when the time came, his feet carried him away.

XI

ASTRID RIIS stood upon the Pipervik quay, watching Reidar's boat come sailing in from Bygdö. She knew perfectly well that it was Holth, but today she was too sad to acknowledge it to herself. No, it was, it must be Reidar, and they were going out together.

Sometimes she would question to herself the advisability of going about so much with a married man, but always answered with a certain amount of bitterness: "Oh, of course I ought to give this up, too!" Her meetings with him were now her only pleasure, and had lately acquired a new attraction from the fact that she could stand and see Reidar's boat come in, and imagine it was he. She did not know Fru Holth, and by a mutual instinct she was never named between them.

The boat soon shot out of the harbour, and as usual she lay down at the bottom and gazed up into the sky. It was so easy there to fall into the hazy condition in which dream and

reality mingled. At one moment she was her mother addressing her petitions to the sun, and at another was with Reidar, bathing from an island out in the sea, lying in the warm sand and letting the wind dry their skin, and then creeping into white linen that smelt of sun and wind, and sitting close together with the sky stretching in a wide arch over sea and land.

Had she dreamt it last night? Would it ever happen to her?

It was at the beginning of August, and the fjord, and hills around, lay in a pale blue twilight, while a long, fiery yellow bank of cloud lay in the western sky. All round them the water was churned up by little steamers and sailing-boats, and now and then they heard the regular beat of a motor-boat.

Holth today was shaken with strong emotion as he thought of those he had left at home; and at the same time every movement that the girl made set his nerves quivering.

"I say," she said, "was Reidar Bang as stupid at school as he is now?"

"She's always making hits at Reidar," thought Holth. "I wonder what there's been

between those two!" Aloud he spoke in Reidar's defense. "Stupid? Reidar? No, indeed! He's shown that well enough since." Then out came her head from under the sail, and she looked at him with a peculiar smile.

The wind soon fell completely, and the fjord became almost white as the twilight deepened.

"How beautiful it is!" she said.

It was a relief to Holth under the pressure of this unrest to begin to talk, and his voice was full of feeling and warmth.

"Yes, it is beautiful, and the darkness, thank goodness, doesn't fall so suddenly as it does farther south. I love our long northern twilight, when men turn their faces towards the sky and feel that the day is dying. I can remember, too, how as a goatherd on the mountains, I would sometimes wake with my head against a sleeping cow, and see the dawn breaking in the clouds. Other clouds came up and blotted it out, but it fought on, established itself in another quarter, poured its creamy light over more and more clouds which tried to shake it off, and at last all over the sky and

then over the earth. It was like a long, painful birth that ended in joy."

He stopped and listened, and she moved her hand as if stroking the boat. Then he began again:

"Do you know, Fröken Riis, that your generation has much clearer eyes to see what is beautiful than mine? We grew up with Zola and Ibsen, and the truth we were taught to worship was uncomfortable and painful. Now it seems wonderful to me that then, too, the apple-trees and lilacs stood full of blossom every single year; but there wasn't a green leaf to be found in all the abstract questions we young people went about with. It's only lately—yes, fancy that I should one day wake up and see that the earth is beautiful!" He turned his face towards the yellow strip in the west and drew a deep breath as if to breathe in something from the sleeping evening.

"Have you never gone in for sport—*ski*-ing or riding?"

After a pause he went on as before:

"Yes, I remember when I was a tutor in Toten, I was riding one evening through

wooded country on a blood-red horse. I can still see the fiery yellow sky above the black hills. The corn was standing on stakes and gave out a moldy smell. When I dismounted to open a gate, the damp wood made my hands cold, and when the gate swung to, the wooden latch gave out a sodden sound. I passed a lonely house whose windows were aflame, and by the wayside stood a woman with a sieve under her arm, shading her eyes with her hand as she looked at me. At last I came out right up on a hill, with Lake Mjösen flaming red in the darkness below me. I remember the horse stopped dead and reared, as if the fjord below were something bloody. Out on a large field I saw a ploughman who whistled as he unharnessed his horses; and the solitary sound seemed to me at the moment to be the song of the twilight itself."

After a little he added: "You must forgive me for sitting here and talking like this, but just now I'm living my youth over again, and much that then passed without leaving any impression now appears to me both rich and beautiful. That's what comes of being in the

company of a young woman. It not only awakens bright hopes, but it also gilds one's recollections."

He ventured warily on this advance, and she once more stroked the side of the boat with her hand. A large steamer with coloured lights at the masthead was coming along—one of those floating palaces, whose inhabitants could fill a town. The enormous shadow drew nearer with a wave of form in front, and then glided past, high, heavy, with long rows of lighted windows, and several decks covered with summer-clad travellers, who gazed at the little vessels down on the dark fjord. Then it had passed, and their little boat was tossing up and down on the waves it had raised, while the steamer itself ploughed its way along, under clouds of smoke, in towards the confusion and light of the town. They two in their little boat were as nothing compared to this monster, and for a moment they sat silently looking at one another, left alone together in the dark.

"There were a great many English there," said Astrid, as she wiped a splash of water from her face with her handkerchief.

"Yes; and many of them will go home engaged."

A little later they had drifted up under an island, where a beam of light fell from a house on to the water; and as they sat there, a door opened on to a balcony, and a woman in white came out and leaning on the balustrade looked out. At last she caught sight of the boat, and called timidly, in a low voice: "Is that you, Herman?" In a little while she said again: "Herman! Is that you?"

"No!" said Holth, laughing, and the woman quickly withdrew.

Astrid laughed, too, and threw herself down.

"I don't suppose it was her husband," said Holth.

"Don't you think so?" For a moment they pictured to themselves a love-story, and both felt a desire to draw closer together. It was quite dark now, and above the yellow strip in the west rose a steely sky overstrewn with stars. Holth began to talk again, but his voice shook and he steadied his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hands.

"What a lot of love-making will be going

on just now all over the country! I can imagine a young couple who have stolen out from a hydro in a boat, or two who have to row across a mountain lake, but forget the oars, or who go along a path from one sæter to another and think they must rest a little. That steamer now was probably bringing young people up to hotels and hunting-cottages in the mountains; and what do you think they will have experienced before they go back? Why, you may be sure the little invisible god will play tricks with most of them, either in a wood, or on an island far out, or in a solitary boat on the water. Then they'll separate and perhaps never see one another again, and the remembrance will be a secret comfort to them both through the years to come, even when one is the mother of a family and the other a husband."

"How lovely it would be to get into the country for a little!" sighed Astrid.

"Yes, we can't get away, either you or I." And for a moment they were united in a common poverty, and there was a long silence. Then he began again.

"I often fancy I can see the little boat rocking upon the lake one moonlight evening, in which a young man is rowing a girl across. There is a scent of hay and ripe fruit wafted from the shore, and he stops rowing to breathe in the perfume of her dress and warm skin. And what happens? Something happens, and when they go up the hill on the other side, they turn and take one another by the hand, look back at the lake and send it a farewell kiss. In another moment they are gone, and the lake once more lies like a mirror of love, waiting for the next. The years pass, those two grow old, and they die with the little secret in their hearts."

Astrid closed her eyes; she could see it all; and her mother seemed to agree so fully. "Where are we?" she asked in a little while.

"We're near Robinson's Island, where nobody lives. Have you seen it in starlight?"

She did not answer, but drew a deep breath and lay back again. The darkness seemed so warm and heavy; they were far from other boats, and they had drifted up under the little uninhabited island. Holth began to row in

strange excitement. Whither? Towards the Island. He only heard his heart beating, and thought he heard hers, too. The boat touched the beach and he leaped out and drew it up. "What is it?" she asked, half dazed. Without answering he gave her his hand, and she took it and sprang ashore. As they went up through the soft sand, they saw their shadows in front of them and involuntarily turned and stood facing the yellow, shining bank of cloud in the west.

"That's you and I," he said when they went on again, pointing to their shadows.

She tried to laugh. "Yes, it's we two, but it might just as well be others."

"How wonderful it is to be wandering here with a young, beautiful woman, and that I—I—should be doing it!" And he took her hand.

She stood still as if to listen. Was it his voice, or another's? There was love now all over the land, but she would never have a love-tale of her own—she who would end her days in the poorhouse.

"Let's sit down here," he said, and looking

round she sat down and lay back in the soft heather and sand, with her hands behind her head, looking up at the stars. Oh, if it were Reidar who was here! Why, of course it was he! They were out on the island and had bathed and dressed in fresh-smelling, clean linen, and were going to sit there together. And she closed her eyes and saw it all so vividly.

She felt a face approaching hers, a breath, heard a hymn of love, many sweet words. It was—it must be Reidar. She could hear the waves breaking on the shore where they had bathed. Now she felt kisses, and involuntarily threw her arms about his neck, holding him tight, in fear that it might not be he.

Another tourist-steamer ploughed its way past with all its lights, and its waves washed in foaming ridges in towards the island.

When Holth, late that night, approached his house, he saw lights in the windows, and wondered why Selma was still up. He was intoxicated with joy. A wonder had happened. Was it true? Had he triumphed? He?

On the way upstairs he stopped and put his hand to his forehead. As a man of honour, there was only one thing for him to do now. What had hitherto appeared as a far-off rosy dream, had now become a necessity; he must obtain a divorce. He could not desert the young girl; he must marry her. It would be hard to tear himself away from those in the house here, but he would have to bear that. He even felt that he could talk to Selma about it now.

She came to the door herself. "You *are* late, poor thing," she said. "Have you been lecturing again, or taking extra lessons?"

"Why are you sitting up so late?" he asked, trying to avoid her arm, which she put about his shoulders.

"Oh, it's because of Susanna, who was taken suddenly ill. But don't you trouble about it. Go to bed, and I'll sit up alone."

"What do you say?" And he hurried into the nursery. A night light burnt beside the low bed. The other children were asleep, but little Susanna lay flushed and hot, turning over restlessly.

"D'ink!" she murmured. "D'ink, mother!"

"Yes, you shall have a drink directly." And she brought the child a fresh supply of water.

"We must fetch a doctor," said Holth. He wanted to go out again.

"He's been. He was afraid it might be inflammation of the lungs."

Holth did not go to bed. The little girl was in a high fever and delirious, and kept trying to get up. Her mother walked up and down with her, and Holth had to relieve her; and while she went backwards and forwards with the moaning child in her arms, he thought of the first time he had gone to meet Astrid by appointment, and had unclasped the little hands clinging round his knees.

"And now you're to have a divorce," said an inward voice. "You're so happy, you know. It's been a wonderful evening you've had." "Yes, yes!" his heart cried in answer. "I wouldn't exchange it for anything in the world." And thoughts of Astrid crowded in upon him, making him forget his poor home and the sick child, and filled him with a joy so intense, so painful, and so strangely beautiful,

that he nearly let the child slip out of his arms. Then he awoke, and looked anxiously at Susanna, who felt safe in his strong arms, and turned her face towards him as she settled down to sleep.

“Father,” she murmured sleepily. “Are we going to the country tomorrow?”

“Yes, yes, dear. Go to sleep now. We’re going to the country tomorrow.”

The night passed, and Selma took his place again, while he went into his study and threw himself on the sofa. Suppose the child were to die today, would he nevertheless go this evening to meet her—the other one—as they had arranged?

“Yes!” he cried wildly and in desperation. “Yes! It is to her I now belong, and nothing in the world shall tear me from her!” But he groaned, his mind was in a whirl; he wanted to call for help, and yet did not want to be saved.

The day passed in taking turns in carrying the sick child up and down the room, and the doctor came again. Towards evening Holth tottered into his room to change his clothes and

shave, for he meant to go out. He told Selma he was going to fetch another doctor.

While he stood at the glass, scraping the soap off his face, he could hear his wife walking up and down with the little one, and trying to sing, although her voice was worn and hoarse:

“Pussy sat spinning under the stove,
When mousey came out of her hole.”

At last he was ready, but just as he had left the room on his way to the door, he met the eldest boy in the passage with a letter for him.

He knew her handwriting and went into the study to read it. His heart trembled; the little piece of paper breathed love, and he kissed it with a smile. But when he opened it, it was to read:

Dear Mr. Holth:

I am not coming this evening, nor tomorrow, nor any other time. If only I had not gone yesterday! Perhaps I shall get through these days, too, but God help me!

I forbid you to meet me any more.

Yours truly,

Astrid Riis.

Holth stared before him with fixed gaze, then crushed the paper between his hands, and let his head sink upon his breast. Then he threw himself upon the sofa, turned his face to the wall and closed his eyes. And as he did so, he heard again, to the accompaniment of tired footsteps:

“Pussy sat spinning under the stove,
When mousey came out of her hole.
Tra la la la, tra la la.”

XII

THE house on Bygdö was quiet while Reidar Bang lay and smoked a cigar after dinner. All the other members of his family were on the mountains, but he had not time to go away, for just now he was engaged in a big speculation in metal-deposits, and often sat working, or at meetings, until far on in the night. To-day he had been for a good hard ride and had then had a swim, after which both his dinner and the rest after it were very enjoyable.

This ceaseless work helped him to forget that in reality he was not happy. This was not, of course, on account of a girl. No, it was something invisible that was always stealing about him and trying to rob him of his sleep and of his power to work, and make him weak and discouraged. The same desire to scorn a sorrow that had made him, on Midsummer Eve, set light to that bonfire, now kept him continually at work with the one object of setting his foot upon the invisible evil.

The verandah door stood open, and the awning fluttered in a light breeze from the fjord. A brown gordon setter came stealing in and licked his master's hand; but when he did not obtain so much as a look in answer, he curled up on the floor with his nose upon his hind legs.

"If that fly gets to the top of the pane without flying away," said Reidar to himself, "I'll send her a letter this evening." But suddenly he turned over quickly and tried to sleep. He remembered how often he had got up in the middle of the night to write a letter, which he always tore up as soon as it was written.

A step sounded on the verandah. A woman's step? He sprang up. Was he not always expecting something? But the dog ran out with a bark of joy, and in another moment Inga stood in the doorway with the dog's fore-paws resting on her hips.

"Oh, is it you?" he said, passing his hand across his forehead. "*Are you* in town?"

"Why, of course, I had to come in and see whether Henrik was alive. He isn't going to have any holiday, poor fellow. And just

fancy! In his spare time he's made all the drawing-room furniture!"

"Would you like some strawberries and cream?"

"Yes, thank you."

The young girl was as brown as a Red Indian, and her eyes beamed with health and good spirits; and she attacked the strawberries, when they came, with voracity.

"So your young man's building your nest, is he? That must be jolly." Reidar was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, with his chin supported in his hands.

"Yes, and do you know—but it's a secret, let me ask you to remember—in the autumn, before we get married, he has decided to leave the place he's in now, and start business on his own account. And you mustn't think he'll take a farthing from either father or you. He's going to manage it all by himself. And if he doesn't get any houses to build, it'll be terribly exciting." And she went on to tell him of their life on the mountains, about her father, who had begun writing a book on the Franco-German War, her mother, who was

weaving, and Fru Ramm, who was looking after the children.

"Have you seen any one else in town?" asked Reidar vaguely.

"I caught a glimpse of Astrid Riis with a basket on her arm, but you needn't think I'd go up to her after the way she treated me the last time we were together. Do you know what they're saying about her now? It's only a story, of course——"

"What are they saying?" Reidar suddenly stood up.

"Nothing," said his sister evasively. "The strawberries were delicious," she went on, as she pushed away the empty plate.

"No, I say, you must tell me. What have you heard?" He was giving himself away beautifully, only his youngest sister had already guessed it long ago.

"Well, I must be off again," she said, getting up. "I'm going by the five o'clock train."

But Reidar put his hands upon her shoulders and held her firmly. "Out with it! What have you heard?"

The young girl laughed up into his face.

“Do you think you’ll get anything out of me in that way? What have I heard? Nothing, my dear boy. It was only my nonsense. Will you let me go now, you wicked ogre? Now, good-bye, and mind you eat a little, for you’re on the way to become a skeleton; but I won’t tell mother that. Now, let me go! Good-bye!” As she went out, she turned and her white teeth gleamed in a smile as she added: “You shouldn’t trouble yourself about people who don’t deserve it, Reidar. You should be above that. Good-bye! Shall I give them your love at home?”

Reidar stood looking at nothing in particular, and forgot to see her out.

That night again he got out of bed to write, but his writing became illegible, and the contents of the letter confused; and when the sun peeped in at the window, he was still sitting in his night-shirt with his elbows on the writing-table.

A few evenings later, after he had gone to bed, he heard a familiar voice beneath his window, calling, “Hullo, old fellow! Are you asleep?”

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When he went to the open window, he saw Paul Tangen standing in the garden.

"Why, bless me, are you in town, too? I'll come down and open the door."

He padded down on his bare feet, and brought his friend up to his bedroom.

"By-the-bye," said Reidar, as he began to draw on his trousers; "the first thing I owe you is a sound flogging."

"No, really?" said Tangen, seating himself in a comfortable chair, and beginning to fill his pipe.

"Yes, when I heard that you'd let all your goods and chattels be sold by auction like any bankrupt, without so much as giving me warning, I felt inclined to come after you and give you a thrashing. You don't know, perhaps, that it's a reflection on us who are your friends?"

"My dear fellow,"—the painter lighted his pipe and blew out the match—"if you ever get put up for auction, I'm scarcely likely to be able to rescue you. Perhaps you'd have gone to my auction and bought my nicest things,

and I should have met them again here in your rooms. No, thank you!

"I could have lent you the money you wanted, of course." Reidar had got into his dressing-gown, and was walking up and down excitedly.

"And from that day the painter was to have lived like a parasite upon his rich friend. Thank you kindly! One reads of such things in novels. And now I propose that we talk of something else. How are you? How many of your rivals have you got rid of lately?"

"Oh, bother!" Reidar sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"You look well!" said Tangen, taking care not to smile. He was almost appalled at the sight of his friend's face, which was changed into bone and hard lines.

"Tell me a little about what you're doing out in the country. Do you really mean to bury yourself there for ever and a day?"

"It's splendid to live in the country. You become so honest towards yourself. Fate saw that I was in want of a header, and there I am, sunning myself day after day, in punish-

ment and retribution. No flirtations; no great man's whims. I was positively on the way to become a superficial and make-believe artist; but now I'm getting the dust out of my eyes and becoming able to see originality again. Things such as a little ragged urchin, a load of hay, or a tethered horse, not to mention a birch or pine in a wind, are all of them mysteries that might give an artist enough to ponder over for a whole lifetime. But you don't want to hear all this!"

"And your wife?"

Tangen got up. "An idyl, my dear boy! Love-making and newly-married nonsense between us from morning till night. Envy me, you wealthy hermit!"

"Then what are you doing in town?"

Tangen did not answer at once. He did not want to tell the truth, which was that he was afraid how it might end with Reidar, if things were as he suspected.

"Well," he said, "I've found a ptarmigan-shoot up in Valdres, and I wanted to come down and tempt you."

"Haven't time now. And I'm not well,

either." Reidar looked at his brown dog, which sat gazing at him and moving its tail along the floor, as if it understood what they were talking about.

"By-the-bye, do you see anything of the schoolmaster?"

"Holth? No, not much. He's been here two or three times to borrow a boat. I suppose it's to take his family on the fjord."

Tangen looked out of the window and nodded. "Y-yes, of course." But then he began to talk about his new dog, about the splendid shoot in Valdres, about lakes full of trout, about sæters and superstitious old women. Reidar looked as if he were waking up, and at last he sprang up. "What's to-day?"

"It's the twenty-fifth—the day after tomorrow."

"Then, confound it, take me with you. I'm getting perfectly mouldy here with calculations and want of sleep and all kinds of idiocies. A taste of mountain air should do one good." And he began to dress, as if he were going to set off at once.

The next morning they were seated in the train to Valdres and towards evening they were walking up a stony mountain road with gun, game-bag, and each his dog on a chain. The wooded hills lay below them, and when they looked back they could just see, far below in the valley, mown hay-fields and yellow corn-fields beside narrow lakes; and far to the north the blue ranges of Jotunheim with their snowy summits.

Reidar often sat down, and though he drew deep breaths of enjoyment, and unbuttoned his coat to get the cool wind, Tangen could see how done-up he was, and how the perspiration ran down his forehead.

"There must have been uncommonly high pressure to put such an engine as that out of gear," he thought. "Upon my word, it was high time to get him away for a little."

As they walked along side by side over the moor, Reidar suddenly stopped and stood gazing at the ground between the car-ruts.

"What's that?" he said, looking up at Tangen. "That's the third time since we began to climb that I've come upon a cross." And

he pointed down at two twigs, one of which happened to be lying across the other. "You may say what you like, but we shall soon hear of a death."

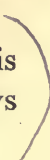
"Oh, well, there's always some one or other dying," answered Tangen carelessly. "Oh, you calculating man of iron, do you still cultivate mysticism?"

Reidar sat down upon a stone once more, and mechanically patted his dog, which had laid its head upon his knee. Tangen sat down close by, and looked at his friend. "We shall hardly reach our destination by supper-time," he thought. "But never mind!"

"Mysticism," began Reidar, passing his hand over his tired face. "As if most things were not inexplicable in this world! Now you think that an artist is something very ethereal, and that a business-man tramps over the ground in wooden shoes. But suppose I were to tell you of the music of gold and the money-market?"

"Eh? Music?"

"Yes, music. The fortunate speculator is not he who calculates best, but he who knows



(how to listen. I know a man who has several times risked his whole fortune, but never been nervous, because he was sure he had heard correctly. He is lying one night half asleep, and notices the rustle of corn over the earth, and in men's minds and the exchanges and money-market tables, and he takes a pencil and puts down some figures as a composer would put down his notes. Then comes the moment when he feels he has to strike, and it is like a bow drawn across a violin. A fortnight ago I lay awake, too, and suddenly began to hear the ore sing, Nordland ore, the endless abundance that will soon create towns and enormous businesses. I listened for a while, and then got up and began to go through the papers I have relating to the mines there. I found none of them satisfactory, but the next day a Lapp comes to me and shows me samples. "There it is," I say to myself, and again I hear the strange song. To make sure, I go to the government analyst and get an analysis, and it is first-rate. Well, now I'm deep in the matter, and have thrown my whole being into it. What do you say to that?"

Tangen sat looking at him. "I've heard of something like this before," he thought. "When strong men go through a period of excitement, they either go mad or become like him."

It was dark when they reached a cluster of sæters just visible beside a narrow lake at the foot of a high grey mountain-ridge. Here and there a cowbell sounded from the low cow-sheds, and at one of the cottages Tangen stopped, saying: "Here it is."

They entered a dimly-lighted room, and saw a fat woman with a rope round her waist, standing at the fire, stirring something in a pot. A long table of planks, a spinning-wheel upon the floor, and cheeses and flat tubs of milk on shelves along the walls, were just discernible; and the room was filled with a mixed smell of milk, cheese, cooking, bed-clothes, human beings and burning juniper branches.

The woman knew the artist at once, as he had been there before; and she hastened to light a candle, dry her right hand upon her skirt, and extend it to them in welcome. Half an hour later a meal consisting of thick sour

cream, fried trout, a monster cheese and bread as hard as iron, stood upon the table; and the sportsmen were as hungry as wolves after their long tramp.

For sleeping accommodation they were shown a broad bed out in a tiny room, where the tallow candle cast a dim light upon walls papered with old, yellow newspapers.

The artist went out to look at the weather, and when he came in said: "I can hear the ptarmigan cackling all round about. By tomorrow evening several of them won't have much to say."

It was almost sad to think of the long procession of sportsmen and dogs that had noisily passed up through the valley. Tomorrow they would be let loose upon the peaceable birds for miles over the mountains, shots would echo from every hill, and many a bleeding wing would beat among the osiers.

The mattress proved to be fresh hay with a coloured woollen covering laid over it. The tired travellers lay down side by side and soon fell asleep, while the dogs on the floor kicked and whimpered in restless dreams of sport.

Early the next morning, after a cup of coffee, the two men set off across the sæter-enclosure with their pipes in their mouths. A heavy watery sky lay low over mountain and moor, and mirrored its woolly clouds in tarn and lake. Tangen's white setter tumbled about over stock and stone with its black ears turned inside out; and Reidar's dark brown galloped backwards and forwards between the juniper-bushes with its nose to the ground.

"What sort of a blunderbuss is that you've got there?" growled Reidar contemptuously, when he saw the artist's gun taken out of its case. "Look here!" And he exhibited his new hammerless of the newest model.

"Take care, old man, that I don't bring down more birds than that does!" answered Tangen gaily, stepping out briskly.

The heather was so wet that their gaiters were soon shining and dripping, and a cutting wind froze their hands and faces. But who would notice such trifles now!

"Do you believe in dreams?" asked Reidar, as he put two cartridges into his gun.

"I doubt more than I believe," answered the

other, hoping to make his companion tell him more about himself. "Did you dream anything special last night?"

"Pan's got scent of something!" Both men stopped. The brown dog had become very cautious in its movements, its back long and low, and its face wise-looking. The white dog noticed it, and approached with the same caution, though it had evidently not yet caught the scent; and then began that play between two dogs that suspect the presence of game, but do not yet know where it is. Now and then they stood still and sniffed the air, and then went over to each other as if to say: "What do you think?" or "Now take care and don't make a mistake!" The two sportsmen stood ready with their loaded guns, watching anxiously.

"Wild's got it," exclaimed Tangen, pleased that it was his dog, as the white dog moved right in the face of the wind, its tail waving vigorously. Now it stood still for a moment with head stretched forward, then moved on a few paces, stopped again, quivering with excitement, then took another cautious step, and

at last stood motionless with extended tail, looking a little to one side as it raised one fore-foot.

"Careful now, Wild!" cautioned Tangen, as the two men approached with beating hearts.

"There's Pan standing, too!" said Reidar. "It's a big covey."

But it was the first day, and the birds kept close, so that the dogs had to be made to advance again and again. The birds must have hidden themselves behind some large juniper bushes, for look as they would they could not discover a feather.

"Forward, Wild! Careful!" The white dog advanced a couple of steps, but then lay down trembling with anxiety lest it should do anything wrong.

Suddenly the brown heather a few paces in front of Tangen's feet became alive, and a flock of brown birds with white wing-feathers got up. Four shots were fired, Tangen's last and at a greater interval, as he gave himself time to take aim. Two birds fell, and he was sure they were his; but Reidar declared angrily that one of them was his. "Very well,"

thought Tangen, "let him think so; but he fired off his shots like a raw recruit, and missed as sure as I stand here. He must be in a bad way!"

They agreed to separate and each work on his own account. Reidar's dog put up many birds, but the fault with them all was that they flew. The artist's gun was heard continually, and fortune favoured him; but when a couple of hours had passed, and Reidar out of twenty shots had only killed two birds, he called in his dog, sat down upon a stone and wiped his forehead. "It's no use," he said to himself, "I'm only thinking of her all the time."

For the ninety-ninth time he asked himself what his sister could have meant. Why would she not tell him? What had happened?

"Don't worry!" he counselled himself, as he took out his pipe, filled and lighted it, and, leaning on his elbow, gazed lazily out over the expanse of pink ling stretching away beneath the woolly sky. He heard the sombre sounds of the mountain, the rushing of brooks, the rustle of the ling in the wind, the distant cry

of an eagle from the clouds, cow-bells on the other side of the lake, and now and then the report of a gun. His eyelids dropped, and he was moving in the same dream-country as last night. He heard a scream from a thicket, went to it and found—her, wounded and bleeding. Ah, that was a dream, too! But now he heard cow-bells close by, and sprang up to find himself surrounded by a herd of angry cows trying to get at his dog. The next moment he was on his feet, beating his way through them with the butt end of his gun; but for a long time the furious animals continued to follow the dog, which always sought refuge with his master.

In the meantime, Tangen had been fortunate and had filled his game-bag. He had got in among some steep mountain cliffs, and thought he must be a long way from human beings, when suddenly the mountains opened out round a small lake, on the shore of which stood a cluster of red-painted sæters. He went into one of them, where he found a young girl in Norwegian peasant dress, who not only supplied him with milk, but was easily pro-

voked to laughter. Whether she had a sweetheart? Perhaps! And what was he? At the school for teachers. What was her name? "Really? My sweetheart's name is Ragnhild, too," said the artist; "so I think you might sit upon my knee for a little." The girl pushed her dark hair off her forehead, laughed, and sat upon his knee for a little while; and after a little persuasion he also got a kiss, and later on another. Gay and cheered by his little adventure, he then went on his way after paying liberally for the milk.

Later in the day he came upon the ruins of an old sæter beside a lonely tarn. The little window in the cottage was broken, the roof of the low cow-shed had fallen in, the sæter-enclosure was overgrown with trees, and there were only remnants of the fence. Tangen was lost in contemplation of the sight, and in a little while sat down, lighted his pipe, and lay leaning upon his elbow. This forsaken dwelling filled him with a strange emotion. Grass had grown over the paths made by people and animals, and perhaps fifty years ago a young Ragnhild lived here, who blew the cow-herd's

horn and made the mountains echo for miles round. And in the autumn evenings, when the wind whistled round the corners of the hut, she listened for footsteps; but there was only the sound of the brook as it ran. The moon played upon the tarn where the fish leaped, the cow-bell rang in the cow-shed, and the fire crackled on the hearth, but no one came.

Then at last one night he came. The hay in the bed was fresh and crisp.

A couple of months later he had married another, and she lay there and buried her face in the pillow of rough sacking. The hay swallowed her tears and the darkness her moans. It is fifty years ago now, but fifty years before that the same thing happened to her grandmother, only the lad who came then wore shoes with buckles, and knee-breeches; but the hay in the bed smelt as fresh and was just as crisp then as now.

It is only a hundred years altogether, but the sæter has stood here for a long, long time, so much will have happened. But now the paths are grass-grown, and all the old Ragnhilds lie in the churchyard, and weep no more,

and no longer wait for any one, no matter how brightly the moon shines.

And you, Paul Tangen, who are forty now—your youth is dead, too. The time when you ran to the sæter because some one was expecting you—when you won, lost, received and gave among young women—that time lies buried in the churchyard. And yet you are alive! Is it worth it!

Oh, to be twenty again, and be able to begin at the beginning! And again his thoughts flew to his old home, where he dimly believed that the girls he had known as a lad still went about as slim and pretty as ever.

When at last he rose and left the spot, he turned several times and looked back, as if the spirits of those girls of long ago still frequented the forsaken place.

Late in the day he walked across a mountain-ridge with the brown grass underfoot, juniper-bushes all round him, and in front a dark talus sloping up into the rolling mist. A pair of eagles cried up in the air, and he stood and watched their flight as they now hung motionless with grey wings outstretched, now fol-

lowed one another in wild chase. They came so close to him that he could see their curved beaks; he fired off both barrels, but with his small shot he might just as well have shot at the moon. At last beside a cairn he caught sight of Reidar, standing out, motionless, against the sky, leaning on his gun.

He shouted to him, but the other did not answer, and it was only when the artist came close up to him that he seemed to wake up. His bag lay on the ground almost empty.

"It's beautiful here," said Reidar without changing his position, and for a moment they both stood looking at the wide landscapes far below them, stretching for miles on all sides in the grey light, with shining lakes dotted over the brown moors, grey bogs and autumn-tinted dwarf birch. The wind had dropped, and the sky, with its clouds like hanging masses of wool, was reflected in the lakes; but here and there, on a mountain-side or on the moor, a streak of light pierced the cloud and made a little yellow patch on the dark ground.

"I'm going home," said Reidar, shouldering his gun. Tangen went with him. Reidar said

very little on the way, but all at once he stopped and said: "Do you believe in dreams?"

"You've asked me that once before today. Do you believe in them yourself?"

Reidar did not reply at once, but then said: "Have you never had a feeling that some one far away is calling you?"

"My dear fellow, you're so strange. Hadn't you better tell me straight out what's wrong?"

Reidar made no answer for a long time, but before they reached the sæter he said: "If we human beings were not so idiotically proud, things might perhaps be very different. As far as fate is concerned, you've said one ought to give it a kick if it showed itself unpleasant; but now suppose it were to be a long struggle? It's perhaps easy for gods to preserve their dignity, but it's difficult enough for humans."

After a bathe in the lake, they came into the sæter, changed their clothes and had dinner; and it was late when they at last sat with their pipes, drinking whisky and water by the miserable light of a tallow candle, while the little house was shaken by the gusts of wind,

which had risen once more. Tangen tried to put Reidar in good spirits by telling some of his wildest stories, but it was hopeless, and at last he became quite low-spirited himself.

In the middle of the night, when they had both been asleep for some time, Reidar suddenly sat up and rubbed his eyes. He had dreamt the same as the night before, and almost unconsciously he got out of bed. "What now?" he said to himself. "What am I doing?" And while he dressed, he kept asking himself what he was doing.

He dressed without waking Tangen, and then, lighting the candle, he wrote a few words on a leaf torn from his pocket-book, placed it upon the table, and crept out. He was fortunate enough to get hold of his gun and his dog without waking the old woman in there; and with his bag in his hand he silently left the sæter.

There was a yellow, stormy light upon the moors beneath the clear sky, across which great black masses of cloud chased one another in wild flight; and as he set off along the rough road with his dog, and his gun slung across his

back, he saw his own and the dog's shadow following like some monstrous moving phantom in the wind.

“Goodness knows what’s going to happen,” he thought. “But she’s in trouble, she has need of me, and I’m coming.”

XIII

It was true, perhaps, that Astrid Riis did not sleep so well just as this time, that she had no appetite, that her head ached strangely, and that both in the office and in the kitchen she would often fall into a brown study and just sit staring before her. But she was strong, and pulled herself together so that no one should notice anything; she had to listen to her father reading, and appear pleased that he would soon be finished. There was no one to ask how she was, and no one who gave it a thought.

It had been easier before, when she could imagine all the things she had to do without. The little kitchen had more than once become a *ski*-ing hill, full of youthful figures, the little drawing-room a ball-room, her father's step in the adjoining room, the step of a young man coming to her. But now it was disgusting to dream, her dreams had played tricks with her, betrayed her, so that she had been

driven into that affair with Holth. The truth was that she was sinking lower and lower, that she could never raise herself and become a pure, innocent girl again. It was best to look things straight in the face and try to bear them.

One day she was standing in the kitchen when the bell rang, and thinking it was a message-boy, she went to open the door without taking off her apron.

At the door stood Reidar Bang. She uttered a little cry, but before she could shut the door again, he was in the passage.

"No, no!" she stammered. "You mustn't——"

"Fröken Riis, I must speak to you."

"Oh, go! Father—he's in there!"

"I intend to speak to your father, too," he said quietly, and catching sight at that moment of a half-open door, he went straight towards it.

"But that's the kitchen, Herr Bang, and it looks dreadful. Do you hear?"

It did have a slightly confusing effect upon

him, too, but they had both entered now, and he closed the door behind her.

"Fröken Astrid!" he said, seizing both her hands.

"Oh, no! You must go!" she said, as trembling and with downcast eyes she tried to free herself.

"Tell me honestly——" he began.

"Let me go! Let me go!"

"You're unhappy!"

"Let me go!"

She breathed heavily. There was a little pause, and she raised her eyes and met his. At once her hands ceased struggling, for this was no dream; it was no horrible man she was imagining; it was he—he!

"Mayn't I help you, Astrid!"

But the next moment her arms were round his neck and she was clinging to him with her face hidden on his breast.

Reidar was not one to be easily upset, and the only thing for him to do now was to kiss her; but when he gently raised her face, she suddenly tore herself away and pushed him from her.

"No, no! You must go!"

"Astrid!"

"It's too late, Reidar." And she fled from him to the other side of the room. "It's too late," she repeated. "Do you hear? You must go!"

"Too late?" he questioned with wide-open eyes, and taking a step forward.

"Oh, do go! Here comes father! Oh dear, oh dear!"

He saw the fear in her face, and involuntarily drew back. "Too late?" he repeated as if to himself. "Too late?"

"Reidar, don't break my heart! Go, oh go!"

He gave in to her and allowed himself to be pushed out, but retained sufficient presence of mind to say: "Well, I'll go now, but of course I shall come again, Astrid."

As he went downstairs, he was vexed to find that his knees were trembling. "Idiot!" he murmured. "You're not drunk!"

Meanwhile the captain had opened the door from the dining-room. "What's all this? Who was that?"

He saw that she hastened to smooth her

hair, and when she stammered that it was the man with the coals, he pursed up his mouth and hurrying to the kitchen-door, tore it open. But there was no one to be seen on the stairs.

"I wonder what's going on here," he murmured, as he shuffled back again.

Later in the day, when she had somewhat calmed down again, she received a telegram: "When can we meet?" During the few moments in which she pondered her answer, she thought of two things—of her father, who would have a stroke, and of herself, who would have to tell Reidar about Holth. Then she wrote her answer: "Cannot. Forget me!" After it was gone she had to sit for a long time and hold herself tightly; but then suddenly she could not help smiling, for he was still fond of her, and she had had her arms round his neck today. She did not feel able to stay in this back flat now; she must go out and try to find some sunshine. And why did she stand in front of her mirror and put on pretty things as if she were going to meet some one, and why did she go and sit down on a seat in the palace park as if she were waiting for some one?

Many young men appeared in the distance and passed, and in the distance some of them resembled Reidar; but why was she disappointed when they came nearer? She knew what answer she had given.

The captain had to wait a long time for his supper, and when at last Astrid came in, he was flushed and angrily pacing the floor.

"Well, I must say!"

"I've been for a walk," she said indifferently, going towards her room.

"So you've been for a walk, have you? And I—I've been sitting working and toiling, and haven't even had supper!"

"There's bread and butter on the kitchen dresser," she said, smiling almost maliciously. "I've been toiling too today, and I'm tired now. Good-night!"

He stood staring at the door after it had closed upon her. This was a new way of answering and behaving! He called her, and knocked at her door, but it was locked; and when an hour later his anger had died down, he sat on lost in thought. This was like—was like a woman who was dead. And that even-

ing Captain Riis forgot to get any supper for himself.

The next day she was the same as usual, but when he had lain down for a nap after dinner, if she didn't begin playing the flute out in the kitchen! He put his feet to the ground preparatory to rushing out to her, but got no farther. This conscious way of defying him reminded him so vividly of another, and it made him so strangely powerless.

The same afternoon, while Astrid was busy making the coffee, she heard a well-known step on the back-stair, and her brother put in his head.

"Can I come in?"

"Yes."

This time he wore a new suit of clothes, was well shaved and clean; and there was an unusual expression of seriousness and determination upon his face.

"You're looking at me," he said. "Well, I'm on that journey now that I mentioned before. And what about my farewell words to the old 'un?"

"What are you going to say, Ivar?"

He pushed his reddish hair off his forehead and laughed.

“Isn’t it funny that what has kept me up all these years has been the desire to meet father one day and look him in the face and contradict him. When I was little he gave me the birch on my bare back, later on he boxed my ears so that I stumbled right across the room, and last of all he preached sermons at me twelve times a day. And I was always a coward and shrunk up like a wet rag, and of course he thought that I couldn’t even think anything myself. Well, since then I’ve given him some trouble, but that was my way of hitting back, though that was cowardly too. But today—well, I’ve borrowed clothes for the ceremony. I’ve thought out a good deal in all these years, and now he shall bear it, if only I don’t let myself be hounded again and lose the thread. I’ve brisked myself up just enough.”

He stood there tall, thin and with clean-shaven face, and winked his red eyelids, as he fidgeted with his new straw hat like a boy.

“Ivar, things are happening with me just

as you said. Nothing can save me now, and the worst of it is that I've begun to be so naughty and bad, and feel as if I did so want to hurt father."

He looked at her for a moment. Was it the new clothes that made him so tactful? He sat down beside her, and took her hand in his, and before she quite knew what she was doing, she was telling him all about it.

"Oh indeed," he said at last, and turned his pale face towards the window. Then he stroked her hair and stood up, seeming taller than before.

"Come with me!" he said.

"No, Ivar! No, No!"

"Come!" he said, drawing her with him. She followed him in a dazed way; she wanted to be with him when he faced their imperious father. But suppose—suppose that should happen which she had once looked upon as a desperate idea, but had latterly begun to feel more and more as a terrible possibility—that she too would have the courage to rise and free herself. It was her only hope of salvation now, but she involuntarily looked at her

hands as if she expected they would be bloody.

"Come on!"

They were in the dark passage, and nearing the door.

"Let me go, Ivar! I can't, I tell you!"

"Come on!"

They entered, but the little drawing-room, with its windows looking on to grey walls, was empty. There was the sound of some one moving about in the next room, however, and presently the door opened and the captain appeared, looking a little sleepy, and with his coat unbuttoned. In one hand he held a long meerschaum pipe, and his mouth moved as if it still held the mouthpiece. "Well!" he said, expecting Astrid had brought his coffee, but then he stopped, all at once wide awake. His son stood there.

"Good day, father!" said the young man, bowing, but uncertain whether to hold out his hand.

"What!" The hand with the meerschaum pipe began to tremble, and the old man retreated a step.

"I've come to say good-bye, father. I start for America this evening."

"Oh! Really! Another voyage to America!" The captain recalled the times he had given money before for the passage, and now perhaps it was the same again.

The young man looked calmly at his father. "I've got help from a friend," he said. "And I hope I shall not have to ask you for money any more."

"Thank you! And you're going this evening in downright earnest?"

"Yes."

"Well, well," said the old man, looking at his pipe, and drawing a deep breath. "Well, God be with you then, Ivar! I—I—everything shall be forgotten as far as I am concerned."

The young man put down his hat and passed his hand across his forehead as if to collect himself. "There was something I wanted to say to you, though, father."

The old man thought it was to be a prayer for forgiveness and waved it aside. "No need,

Ivar. Behave better where you're going, that's all."

"Well, that wasn't what I was going to say." There was a pause, during which the father and son looked at one another.

"Wasn't it?"

Astrid here tried to slip out, but her brother put his hand upon the door-handle and prevented her.

"Ivar!" she begged.

"No, stay here, Astrid."

"What is it?" said the captain looking from one to the other.

Astrid leaned against the wall, feeling as if the floor was slipping away from her; for it was coming now.

"I've something to settle up," said the young man, looking his father straight in the face.

The captain's lips grew hard.

"Won't you sit down, father?"

"Thank you, I'd rather stand." He laid down his pipe in the window.

"You—you're unhappy, father."

"What!" said the old man, standing erect.

"For we're unhappy too, Astrid and I."

"Oh! And is that my fault?"

"Has that never occurred to you?"

The captain drew a step nearer, with wide-open eyes, and there was a pause.

"Ivar!" said Astrid again beseechingly, but her brother refused to let her go.

"What was that you said?"

The son again passed his hand across his forehead, as if to find the right words.

"Yes, father, it's quite true that you've had trouble, but if the parents are ill, have they a right to infect their children?"

The old man threw back his head and gazed open-mouthed.

"And if the parents suffer mental torture, have they a right to shut up their children in the same everlasting torture?"

Captain Riis looked like a man whose hat had blown off, and who did not know which way it had gone. He went up to Ivar.

"You've been drinking, Ivar, and you must go." And unconsciously the young man fell back a step as he had so often done before when he was going to be punished; but at the

door he stopped again, picking up his courage again, and faced his father once more.

"Go, Ivar!"

Here Astrid went to her brother, and again the captain opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Yes, father, I'm going; but first you shall know that we had a miserable childhood, both Astrid and I."

The captain turned his eyes to his daughter. "Astrid, do you hear that?"

The young girl stood leaning against the wall, pale and trembling. It seemed to her that her mother was near her, and she unconsciously stretched out her hands for invisible aid.

"Astrid!" repeated the old man. "Do you hear that?" But she only closed her eyes to avoid his.

At this the captain fell back a step, feeling with outstretched hand for a chair to lean upon, and gazed from one to the other of the two children who seemed to have conspired against him.

"Has it never occurred to you, father, that you have ill-used us?" continued the young

man. "When we were little we were never allowed to play, or laugh, or sing, or be children. We were to feel your sorrows, hate your enemies, feel sorry for you, and become this thing or the other, so that you should have your revenge and satisfaction. There was never any sunshine for us. I turned out as might have been expected; there's nothing more to be said about that. But now there's Astrid!"

"Ivar!" broke in the young girl; but she put her arm about her brother, as if seeking his protection; and once more the old man retreated before them.

"Astrid!" he cried in a trembling voice, as if he could not yet believe it. "Astrid, do you hear what he says?"

Captain Riis was accustomed to feel himself a martyr, and at war with heaven and earth; but that he himself should be to blame? His feet moved mechanically, as if he no longer dared rely upon the floor he stood upon.

"Astrid, why don't you answer him? Do you hear, my child? Have I—have I been so unkind to you?"

The young girl trembled and closed her

eyes, and again her hand moved as if seeking a support that no one else could see.

There was a coldness about these two, they were strangers, indeed they were enemies; and now the captain had to sit down because the room began to go round. He put his hand over his eyes to wake himself. He passed it over his thin grey hair, as if he expected it had turned white. He tried to laugh, but it was half a sob, tried to rise, but found it difficult. When at last he stood up, he leaned one hand on the back of a chair for support, and with the other eased his collar to make breathing easier, and at last got out the words:

“Oh indeed! That—that’s enough!” Then he turned to go to his room, but at the door half turned, leaned against the frame and stood erect.

He meant to have said “good-bye,” but the word would not come. There must be some mistake. He must lower himself so far as to say a few words in self-defence to his own children.

“Well,” he began, as if talking to the room —“well, there may possibly seem to have been

little sunshine here, that's quite true. You two have not had things like others of your own age. But what about me? Has no one ill-used me? Great heavens, have I been allowed to live my own life? I was once a young, ambitious lieutenant, who dreamt of rising high; but I had to bring my education to an end and take a post as civilian, because my mother and brothers and sisters had to be provided for. Afterwards it was your mother and you two. My school-fellows could go on with their special subjects and get promoted; but I was left behind, for I had first of all to earn money—always more, always more. And what did I get in return? I sacrificed my youth, my career, my happiness, and what did I get in return? Your mother—well, peace be with her. And you two? You, Astrid, I thought—but there! You—you too stand there and call me a criminal! And what is my life then? Is it sunshine? Ha, ha, ha!” He laughed a dismal laugh. “Well, perhaps I am one of those people who are only born to be trampled upon; but it's not so easy to be content with it.” His head dropped on his

breast; it seemed as if he were ashamed to stand and lay his soul bare before his children.

"Father!" cried Astrid, going to him and throwing her arms round his neck. The old man clasped her to him with a sob, though he smiled, for he had got back his daughter. But the younger man, who was himself shaken with emotion, felt that his sister had now lost her foothold, and must be helped.

"I know you've had a hard time, father," he said respectfully, going nearer. "And I've—I've much to ask your pardon for. But it was about Astrid—"

"Ivar!" said the young girl beseechingly.

"Astrid?" repeated the old man, putting his hand on his daughter's head. "What about you, child?"

Summoning up all his courage, the younger man replied: "She's engaged."

"Ivar, Ivar!"

The old man looked from one to the other. "Engaged?" he repeated.

"Yes, and you must not oppose it, father."

"I?"—the captain still understood nothing—"No, of course not, but—"

"She didn't dare tell you."

The old man again looked at his daughter, who now drew away from him. "Is it true, Astrid? But why—who is he?"

"It's Reidar Bang, son of the general," said her brother retreating a step.

"Ivar!" groaned the young girl and fled to the door.

"Who did you say it was?" The old man came a step nearer, and seemed not to have heard correctly.

"A son of General Bang; and that's why she didn't dare tell you," repeated Ivar, as he once more prevented his sister from running away. There was a pause, and the captain stared at his daughter, who crouched together at the door.

"Astrid!" he said at last. "Do you hear what he says?"

"Yes, father," she replied, recovering herself at last, but looking involuntarily at her hands.

"Bang, did you say?" And he trembled so that he had to cling to the door-frame. "Are you engaged to him?"

"Yes, father." She looked at her father with wide-open eyes, as if expecting something to happen; but the old man did not fall to the floor.

"Astrid!" he said beseechingly. "Don't make fun of me. Say it isn't true!"

"It *is* true father," she whispered, closing her eyes.

Ivar now took up his hat and turned to go; but at the door he stopped. "If Astrid is to live her own life, father," he said, "it must be now. If you want her to be happy, you must give her leave."

The captain still tried not to believe it. "But dear me, child, you don't know any of the family!"

Astrid, who had so often said what was not true on this subject, felt relieved at being able to speak out.

"Yes, father, I've often met him. I've stayed at the general's, and his daughter has been my best friend for a long time."

The old man's head dropped upon his breast and he shrank together as if he had been struck. So it was true; the last light was ex-

tinguished, and these children, to whom he had just confessed his failings, had betrayed him and gone over to the enemy.

He advanced a couple of paces, seized a chair, and raising it, brought it down so forcibly upon the floor that the back gave way. "Very well," he cried, beginning to laugh again. "Then go to the general! Go, Astrid!" And hastening to the door, he opened it, then on to the hall-door and opened that, shouting, beside himself with rage: "Go! Go! Go!"

Astrid managed to get hold of her hat, and ran with her brother down the stairs. In the entry at the bottom they paused for a moment and looked at one another. "I managed it!" said the young man, his thoughts on his own share in the matter. "But it wasn't easy!"

Astrid put on her hat, and they went into the street. The sun was shining, and for a moment seemed to dazzle them.

"Where will you go now, Astrid?"

"I—I shall go up to father."

"Indeed you shan't! You must promise me you'll go to Reidar Bang, indeed I'll go with you. I'll get a cab."

"No, no, I'd rather come down to the boat with you. There'll be nobody coming to say goodbye to you, I suppose."

They got into a cab, and for the first and last time the brother and sister drove together through the noisy town. Then among busy dock-labourers and a crowd of people, they bade each other goodbye, and Astrid clung to her brother with her arms about his neck.

"Goodbye, my dear girl. Thanks for all the food you've smuggled into me." He tried to laugh.

"Write often, Ivar; and promise me you'll behave."

Then they parted, but as he was going on board he heard her voice again, and turned back.

"Look here!" she said, putting a little locket into his hand. "It's mother's."

"No, Astrid, it's yours."

"You take it now. I've nothing else to give you. And think of her and me." She tried to smile through her tears, then turned and hurried away through the crowd.

The Bang family had just moved in from the country, and the two old people were sitting alone late that evening, when the bell rang. A little while after there was a tap at the door. "Come in!" cried the general, raising his eyes from his book. The door opened, and Reidar pushed the bashful young girl before him into the room.

"Here I come with my sweetheart," he said. "And perhaps mother and father will give her house-room for a time."

A couple of hours later Astrid was lying in a large well-lighted room, and Fru Bang sat by the bedside, stroking her cheek and telling her that all would be well. The young girl smiled and sobbed both at once. She could not forget the sight of the coffee standing ready out in the little kitchen at home, and that it had not been taken into the drawing-room. Everything had been left as if there had been a sudden fire in the house. Here she lay in one of Inga's nightdresses. What had her father done? By this time her brother was far out on the fjord, and she would never see him again. And in the midst

of all these dreadful things she had spent some hours with Reidar—at last, at last! And now she was here, and they were all trying to see who could show her most kindness. Was it all a dream, another of her visions?

The end of it was that Inga's bed had to be moved into her room, as she was afraid to sleep by herself.

When all the others had retired for the night, the general was still walking up and down on the thick carpet in the drawing-room. Now and then he stopped to listen, as if he expected he might hear the breathing of the young, beautiful woman who had been wafted so suddenly into his house.

How exactly she resembled her mother! And how time passes!

XIV

EARLY the next morning the general sent the following letter to Captain Riis:

“My dear comrade,

It looks as if we were going to the manœuvres again together. May I report myself at your service today at one o'clock?”

At the appointed time he walked with his usual easy gait through the street. He could not possibly take the eccentric old man very seriously; and he had nothing to reproach himself with. A man hungers for life and work, and rushes about from one thing to another; and now and then he meets with a little adventure, which he takes discreetly and then hastens elsewhere, because duty calls him. Who can say he has not done so? Perhaps some one or other suffers for it; but that a man who is worth anything can sit down and stare at a little suspicion, even engage it as his companion for years and years—no, the gen-

eral could not understand that, he could not possibly take it seriously, and now he was going to let a little fresh air into the old hermit's abode.

Astrid had lain awake for a long time, but after her great excitement she was thoroughly worn out, and went on sleeping and sleeping. When at last she opened her eyes, the room was full of sunshine, and Fru Bang was standing beside her, smiling.

"Well, I'm glad you've slept so well, my child," said the pretty, white-haired old lady. Astrid sat up in bewilderment. What had happened? Where was she?

"Reidar was here early, and has telephoned several times since; but I told him that a newly-engaged girl needs sleep."

"What time is it?"

"Oh, only twelve, or perhaps a little past one; but you may go to sleep again if you like, child."

It was strange, this getting up. She felt as if she were in a calm after a storm, but that something would soon break out again. She had dreamt of becoming a daughter-in-law of

this house, and now here she was; and yet she looked about her as at a strange place. What was the matter? She was told that Reidar had already given notice to her employers that she would not be returning to the office, so she would not have to dress in a hurry to be off, nor light the kitchen fire, nor lay the table and make the beds, nor wash up. She was free at last—free! And yet there was something wrong.

Fru Bang left her and half an hour later, when Astrid went down and entered the large, bright corner-room, she found herself in the midst of a family conclave, consisting of Reidar himself, his parents, Fru Ramm and Inga. There was a dead silence when she entered. "Here she is!" said the general, hastening towards her and putting an arm round her waist. "Now let's hear what she thinks!" said Reidar, taking both her hands in his; Astrid did not look as if she had any opinion, but seemed inclined rather to take flight. Fru Ramm got up, smoothed down her well-fitting skirt, and looked with a little astonishment at Astrid's faded cotton dress, but then went up

to her and kissed her, saying: "Welcome into the family! So it was you who were to turn Reidar's head at last, was it?"

"Your fiancé's so impatient, Astrid," said Fru Bang. "He wants to get married this very day, and he won't understand that it wouldn't be decent before a month at least."

Astrid, who had seated herself on a chair, now looked down and blushed.

"Well, we were engaged for two years," said Fru Ramm glancing in the mirror to arrange the veil round her hat.

"And Henrik and I!" added Inga, evidently not liking that things should be made so much smoother for her friend.

Reidar stood beside Astrid, with his hand on the back of her chair. "Well, it's a good thing to receive good advice," he said smiling.

Fru Ramm and Inga exchanged glances, understanding that they must not interfere any more in the matter.

"But first of all, Astrid," said Fru Bang, smiling a little uncertainly. "We must try to come to an arrangement with your father."

The young girl's head sank lower, and she hid her face in her hands.

"Excuse me, mother, but I would suggest that Astrid has a little breakfast," said Reidar, knowing that she must feel as if she had been dragged into court; and he gave her his arm and led her into the dining-room, where a meal was laid for one. "Now, then, eat away, and leave everything else to me. Did you sleep well?" he asked, bending back her head, and kissing her eyes.

She did not answer, but sat down and tried to eat, while he went round the table and smiled at her from one side. Fancy! She used her knife and fork like any ordinary person! And when she chewed her food, her cheek bulged out on one side, just like other people's! She threw side-glances at him too, and smiled a little anxiously. For weeks they had both been making pictures of one another in their own minds, and it did not follow that they were correct. They were suddenly engaged, these two.

He pressed her to eat, and sat down beside her. At last she was sitting in his parents'

house! Her hands were still red, and he was angry when he felt a lump rise in his throat. A hum of voices came from the next room, and it disturbed him. He would go in and put an end to it.

"The only thing is," Fru Bang was saying as he entered, "what shall we say to people? Astrid is heartily welcome here, but of course every one knows that until now she's lived with her father, and how shall we explain—"

"I'll tell you how, mother," said Reidar. "I'll take Astrid with me to the magistrate this very morning, and then we'll go back to my house a married couple; and you can sit here and wonder what people will say." His freckled face was quite red now, and his eyes not in the least sleepy. Did they think they could forbid him to marry?

"Now, now Reidar!" said his mother. "Don't be so hasty! Isn't that just like you!"

Fru Ramm and Inga smiled at one another.

"Well, I agree with Reidar!" said the general suddenly, rising. "We can surely be allowed to have a daughter-in-law staying in the house without having to account to all the

world for it. And as for that old curmudgeon—I've gone once to Canossa, and confound it, I'm not going to do it again! The girl's of age. Give the old man three weeks, and if he hasn't capitulated then, just have the wedding and say he's dead, and there's an end of it."

"Very well, then that's settled," said Fru Bang. But Inga pursed up her lips into a grimace, and hurried out.

Astrid could not rest, and persuaded Reidar to go at once with her to her father, for the worst might have happened since yesterday. So for the first time the two young people walked together through the town, the well-dressed young man making a great contrast to the young girl in her faded straw hat and cotton dress; she might have been his maid-servant.

"If we only knew what there was between our fathers," said Reidar.

"Yes. I suppose you couldn't very well ask your father?"

"No. I couldn't. In some matters he's a little difficult to approach."

Soon they were standing ringing at the

door through which Astrid had so often entered with her own key. The bell sounded as if the house were empty, but the porter had told them that the captain had not been out. They rang again and again, ready to go in, hand in hand, to the old man; but there was no sign of any living being. At last Astrid turned, pale and frightened, to Reidar, and he understood her. "We must wait till tomorrow," he said. "Then if the worst comes to the worst, we must burst open the door."

The next day, however, they met the old charwoman on the stairs. She told them that as she went up the stairs that morning, the captain was just opening his letter-box, and he asked her to go out and get him something to eat. She was engaged to come and look after him now, but she was strictly forbidden to let any one in.

"How is he?"

"Oh, he's better now, since he's had something to eat. He's shaved too, and now he's sitting turning over the pages of a big manuscript."

It was an indescribable relief to Astrid. The

worst had not happened. He was walking about, had engaged some one to look after him, had eaten, and had begun to work. As soon as they reached a secluded corner of the stairs, she threw her arms round Reidar's neck, saying: "Now it'll be all right again, you'll see!"

Reidar too felt relieved, and on the way home said:

"We'll go and buy some flowers for mother, for I was rather hard on her yesterday, and then you must come with me to grandmother's. You don't know how pleased she'll be. And that'll be the only visit we'll make."

So the captain was left in peace for a little while, and in the meantime Astrid tried to be happy and hope that things would turn out all right. But although one anxiety was removed, another took its place. "Holth!" sang always in her ears. "Are you going to tell Reidar everything now?" No, no, she dared not; it would be risking everything. But could she have a single happy day if she kept on deceiving him? No, but could she not put off doing it now? "And if he gets to know of it in some other way," she thought. "Well, then every-

thing would be over, and it will be with me as it was with mother. But perhaps it will be some time before the dreadful thing happens, and until then I'll be happy for once, too."

She was accustomed to carry about a secret pain that no one must see, and the continual fear only made her cling the closer to Reidar. She really did not know him. Now she was so near him, he was not altogether what she had thought him. His voice was different, his glance, his chin, his mouth. In her thoughts she had always pictured him on *skis*, as he had been that Easter; and gradually he had come to represent all that she had missed, play, freedom, the blue sky, and he even became the standard of a tremendous obstinacy that gave her a delightful feeling of dizziness. But now! Why, he could sing, and talk about art! He had had to begin as a barber in America, and had frozen and starved in Klondyke—he, the general's son! He took her to church, not to hear the priest, but the singing and the organ. He was quick to become angry, and it was quickly over; but he tried to hide both conditions. She never seemed to come to the end

of him, and when she was more than usually anxious, he was more than a human being to her; he was for her the bright life to which she clung.

Just because she had a feeling that it would all soon come to an end, the days that followed were wonderfully full. To wake in the morning and say to herself: "You're not going to the office, nor into the kitchen; you're free—free! It's certain you'll get no scolding to-day! It's Reidar," she thought, and would have liked to embrace him there and then. Was it not nice to call every little pleasure by his name? To have early morning coffee, and then be lazy a little longer, because there was nothing she was obliged to get up for. To go into the big bathroom, and do gymnastics before the open window, take a cold shower-bath and then towel herself until the skin was red. Thank goodness, she thought, as she looked at her shapely limbs, "I'm just as strong now as I was when I was in the gymnastic-class. The warm, comfortable glow afterwards, filled her mind with thoughts of an open-air life in wind and sunshine. It was

Reidar, she thought again, with a smile. In her room where all the paint was white, when she drew back the yellow curtains, she no longer saw sooty walls, but only yellowing tree-tops, and beyond, the fjord. The sun shone upon her, and she let her dressing-gown drop, and turned round and round in the bright light. It was Reidar again. "Did you do this, mother, that time?"

She had never dreamt it could be such a pleasure to dress herself, but now everything she put on was perfectly new and clean. Strangely disguised parcels were always being brought her by Fru Bang. There was a superabundance and it would have been painful to have received it all, if she had not suspected from whom it really came. He might transform her as much as he liked; it all, and she herself, belonged to him. Her hands touched everything caressingly before she put it on. But in the midst of all her joy, a fear would dart in. "Father left alone in poverty!" She would write to him. "But Holth! If Reidar knew!" It was as if she were hold-

ing roses in her hands and they suddenly pricked them and made them bleed.

Well, it would all soon be at an end, but for that very reason every little thing was wonderfully delightful. Those long stockings, for instance, they must be silk; there was such a pleasant feeling when she drew them on. It was Reidar she whispered, trembling, she knew not why, and with beating heart. All her garments, and the pretty shoes, were all something of Reidar in which she clothed herself. When she moved, their touch upon her body was like tiny caresses, and a wave of feeling rose within her, and her eyes dropped. Then she stood before the mirror and put up her yellow hair; but where have all these new brushes with tortoise-shell backs come from? On her dressing-table lay a whole world of combs, and boxes, and bottles, and all the thousand and one things that are woman's secret; and involuntarily she smiled at her reflection in the mirror.

The morning was passing, however, and downstairs the general would suddenly rush in from the study with his pen behind his ear,

to ask whether the child were not up yet. "No," said his wife. "You said yourself that she was to think of nothing but eating and sleeping." Yes, yes, of course, he had said so, and yet he waited about impatiently. "What do you think of her, Marie?" he asked, stopping in front of his wife, who sat sewing with spectacles on. After a slight pause, she answered: "Oh, well, it's easy to see she's never had any real home; but we must hope for the best."

"I'm thinking of taking her for a drive to-day. You others monopolise her altogether." And he trotted up and down quite angrily. "Yes," said his wife, smiling. "It's easy to see you're in love with her." "Of course, I'm in love with her! And it does one good too; it makes one feel quite young."

Before they had paid their visit to the oldest member of the family, the old lady herself came in one day, with stick in hand, and paused in the middle of the room. "Well, what's going on here?" she said. "Is it that young woman?" And she turned her long-handled glasses upon Astrid. "Oh, so that's what the girl's like who's at last bewitched

that obstinate boy. She's got red hair, and so has he. There'll be a beautiful collection in this house in time." Then she sat down, and pointing to a chair beside her, said: "Come here, child, and let us have a little talk together."

It was wonderful to become all at once a daughter in a wealthy house. They were at her beck and call because she was Reidar's fiancée; and at the same time it was strange how they spoke of him. "My extraordinary son," the general would say with an ironical smile. When Inga mentioned him she often laughed. His mother shook her head and smiled. But no sooner did he enter than they all flocked about him.

The time for the wedding was drawing near, and according to custom, it should have been held at the house of the bride's father! But Astrid's father! The whole of her trousseau she had to take from her parents-in-law. It was a little humiliating, but she hoped it would all be paid for by Reidar. She went with Fru Bang to costumiers where she chose materials without regard to their price, and tried

on dresses so beautiful that she hardly dared touch them. It was like a fairy-tale, and so overpowered her that she would have liked to hide herself. The general, who was always covertly watching her, noticed that she was undergoing a great transformation. Her carriage became more graceful, her step lighter; her voice took on a brighter tone, and when she raised her eyes to look at one, it was with a faint beautiful smile.

"I must try to do something in return," she thought, and fortunately she had had a few kroners in her purse when she left home so hurriedly. She had earned them honestly, and they were just sufficient to buy a white waistcoat for Reidar and a cloth for Fru Bang. She would embroider them both herself, the cloth in the morning, when she sat with Fru Bang and Inga, but the waistcoat only came out when she was alone at night. As she sat working this for her lover, every stitch seemed something between them. But often a fear would start up within her, and her hands would tremble.

She had not written to her father yet. She

went on hoping that things would right themselves. Perhaps he would come himself. But every day she hurried up the back stair to hold a whispered conversation with the old charwoman. Things seemed to be going on all right, and it was a comfort to her to be able to send in something nice for him to eat.

Reidar had to put up with a good deal of teasing from his friends at this time. "Here comes the woman-hater!" they would say. "Yes, you are right; woman is the very devil!" But Reidar would smile and hurry on with a wave of the hand. He was not one to neglect his business because he happened to be going to be married; but the worst of it was that he often had to tear up a long business-letter, because some ridiculous lyric had slipped into it. What was still worse was that he forgot his horse, so that it stood in the stable for three days without exercise. While going through his gymnastic exercises in the morning, he would remember something that might be made prettier downstairs before Astrid came, and he would leave off and run down to see. It vexed him greatly, and he often swore mild-

ly at himself, and called himself an idiot. What was the good now of being afraid that he might have ventured out into pure gambling in his business? He would be careful now, and remember that he was responsible for others beside himself. All his thoughts were centered on bringing things safely to land and being wise. But was it not only nonsense? He must not let the girl make him a coward? And yet he was much better than he had been, and he no longer had the feeling that something invisible was creeping about him and trying to injure him. He had at last trodden it underfoot; he had triumphed, he was free. Ah, what cannot love do!

There was one person, however, who was not happy just now, and that was Inga. She had to appear to be good friends with Astrid again, but she had been the spoilt child of the house, and now she was always being pushed on one side. It was nothing but Astrid all day long now. And here was she practising how to save and be poor, while the other was actually receiving instruction in being extravagant and rich. It was certainly not easy to

be always smiling and look as if everything was alright.

Today she was hastening down townwards to meet Henrik as he came from his office. Reidar's motor-car had come to fetch Astrid, but she would not accept the invitation to ride with her—no, thank goodness, she had feet to walk with! No one knew that she and Henrik had taken a small flat up in Homansby, and that it was almost complete. Henrik had made most of the furniture himself. It had been proposed that they should get married the same day as Reidar, but Inga had emphatically refused; she would not be tacked on to them for all the world, and they had now decided to be married at a registry and then go home quite alone and have dinner.

There he was! When he came up, she took his arm and they went off together without any fixed destination.

"You're so pale again today," she said. "Have you been disobedient and sitting up last night?"

He pushed his large felt hat off his face and smiled. "Only a few hours," he said. "I

had an idea the other day, and was working a little at it. What do you think about a new laying-out of Kampen? It's a miserable neighbourhood now with its alleys and huts and all manner of filth; but it's got a splendid situation, and some day there'll be broad avenues with fine houses and gardens and fountains up there. Shall we go up now?"

"I don't think I've got time. Oh yes, though, I can all the same."

Formerly his brother had been accustomed to go with him on these expeditions, when he went about with his ideas of transforming the town into something great and splendid; but now it was Inga, and the young girl was proud of being allowed to share his ideas, even though it sometimes took her into the most evil-smelling parts of the town. Now and then she would take the opportunity and get him into some archway to give him a kiss. And when he came to the end of a long explanation, she would say: "And when are we going to set about it in earnest?"

There was a little pause before he answered:

"Well—that is—well—it'll scarcely be in our time."

"What? Won't it be in—? Then why are you bothering about it?"

"It'll be done some day, that you may be sure of. The idea's there, and that's the chief thing."

"But dear me, we can't live on that, we two!"

"Oh, nonsense! It won't be difficult to scrape together enough for us to live upon."

"Well, *I* shan't want much, Henrik." And so they wandered on, beginning another romance.

The last Sunday before the wedding, Astrid and Reidar went into the country in the motor up among the Bærum Hills, where they wandered about in the woods with a basket between them, and at last encamped under a tree. Astrid laid out a little lunch upon a spread-out rug, and they ate and drank to one another. When they had finished and packed everything into the basket again, they shook out the rug and then lay down on it side by side, she with her head upon his shoul-

der. He could smell the perfume of her hair, as he buried his face in it. Over the tree-tops spread the blue September sky, and a little way off, a hawk hovered motionless with outstretched wings.

"Do you know," she said suddenly, "I really don't know you at all."

"I've thought the same thing. Even when we're together we don't get much idea of one another."

"Do you believe in fate?"

He kissed her closed eyelids and answered: "I believe in everything and nothing; but at any rate I believe in you."

"Is it true that you're so unmerciful towards your rivals?"

"I'll be kinder henceforward," he answered, kissing her on the forehead. She opened her eyes and her hand went up to his hair.

"What is one person to another?" he continued. "If we could account for that, it would be incredible. I love you, but who can say why. Perhaps you're a memory for me, a little bit of sunshine or shade, a glance, a turn of the head. Or perhaps a fear."

"Or a bare heel, a hole in a stocking."

"What?"

"You said so once. I conquered you by having a hole in my stocking. Deny it if you can." And she pricked his face with a piece of grass.

"Do you know it's been prophesied that a woman will be my ruin?"

"Well, here she is." And she put her arm about his neck, and then, burying her face in his breast, she said: "Oh Reidar, Reidar, you—you must bear with me."

"Bear with you? Oh yes, I almost think I shall be able to manage that."

She raised her head again, opened her eyes, and looked up into the blue sky.

"We shall go about a great deal, shan't we? I'll go with you shooting and let all the winds blow right through me; and sailing out to a far-off island, where we can breathe together and let the wind dry us as we lie in the stiff sea-grass. And we'll go out into the world and see all the beautiful things that are to be seen." And she closed her eyes and dreamt

herself away. "Mother," she said to herself. "What do you say to that?"

Suddenly she sat up, and looked at him almost in fear. "Suppose anything should come in the way!"

"In the way?"

"Yes, you often hear of—of, for instance, the bride dying the day before the wedding."

"What nonsense! You've said that once before."

She lay down again, and closed her eyes, her hand on his head. She still had him; he knew nothing yet. It was as though she lay at the bottom of a boat, drifting down a beautiful river; but where was it going? To close her eyes and let it go—yes, but suppose the roar of a waterfall grew louder and louder?

"Which of your friends are coming to the wedding?" she asked, forcing herself to be calm.

He mentioned some names; there were many. Holth was among them, and she started.

"Is he coming too?"

"It's not certain that he will. He answered

so strangely that I think he probably won't."

She lay quiet for a little while. A shiver ran through her. Suppose this with Holth should have consequences that there would be no hope of hiding! The possibility cut like a knife. If it happened, then it meant death. Was this the terrible thing that she felt coming upon her? She opened her eyes, but what she saw was not the trees or the blue sky. It was her mother, far off and yet near, unreal and yet alive, standing smiling at her. "That is how it happened with me, and it will be your fate too. Then we shall be together." And the white figure extended her arms.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Reidar, turning her face up to his. And again she threw her arms about his neck, and clinging to him, moaned: "Reidar! Reidar!"

XV

SINCE Captain Riis had been alone, much had happened; but now it was all over and he began to be quite calm. The night after his children had gone, he wandered about in the woods outside the town. Towards morning it began to rain, and he discovered that he had lost his hat and had only slippers on his feet. When he got home he went to bed, but felt he must get up again. While he was standing gazing down into the yard, a man appeared there. What? The general! Satisfaction! Begging for forgiveness! Yes, of course! But it was too late now. The bell rang. He got into bed again. It rang again. He drew the clothes over his head. It rang several times. Let him ring! Later in the afternoon the bell rang again. He had not seen who it was this time, but he guessed. He was still in bed, and did not get up.

Once in a fight, he had seen a man struck down to the ground several times, but each

time getting up to strike back, and each time paler and bloodier. He got up on to his knees, but was struck down; he raised himself on his elbow and received another blow; at last he only raised his head, still with the hope of revenge in the dull eyes, but the strokes were merciless. He was an old, grey-haired man. Captain Riis had also again and again been struck to the earth, and now he was trying for the last time to rise, trying in his way to hit back. He pulled himself together to finish his army-organization scheme; he would show that he was not crushed yet. One day he really brought it to a conclusion. He brushed his faded coat and silk hat, and set out with a packet under his arm. It was a great day. He also obtained an audience with the minister of war, and entered. It was a great moment.

His speech was a little hesitating, but his eyes shone as he held out his packet. The minister looked astonished, and seemed unwilling to take it. "But don't you know," he said, "that the military committee are finished with the army organization? Oh no, Storthing has

not taken it up yet, but when both the larger committee and the Department are agreed about it, a completely new scheme will scarcely be likely to have any influence." The minister turned to the window for a moment, as he stroked his dark moustache. "I may perhaps tell you that we have been positively flooded with new schemes, especially by retired officers." And he smiled to soften the effect of his words. "But you'd better go to the chairman of the military committee," he concluded evidently to get rid of his visitor.

With compressed lips, Captain Riis made his way out of the room with his packet. The military committee had often called in General Bang as adviser, and its chairman was a young captain. Should he humble himself and go there too and be sent away? No! But half way up the street he turned. There was still a remnant of hope. He tried to hold himself erect, and went there.

A couple of hours later the charwoman was busy cleaning the house, when he tottered in, threw the packet on the table and sank into a chair with his hat on. His eyes were blood-

shot and he spoke to himself of things that the old woman did not understand a word of. At last he allowed her to help him into bed, and there he remained for a couple of days.

But now this was over too. Captain Riis felt that he had passed through his last disappointment, and that there was nothing left for him to hope for. He began to busy himself again with little things, and discovered that he had still legs to walk with. The days were rather long, however. An empty house is an advantage for any one working, but he had nothing to do now. A retired captain is nothing very much, but while he is forming an army-scheme he is more than a general; he becomes a ruler, and his hand is all-powerful. But now that was all over too. He was once more degraded into an old, crushed man, who could not sleep at night and dared not go out in daylight. He tried to draw for the engineer's office, but his hand trembled and his eyes were worse than ever. He had a debt of honour now, and it became clear to him that he must give up all thought of paying it.

Time really hung upon his hands. He went

to bed at night without having done anything in the day; he got up in the morning without expectation of anything good. He went out at twilight, always with the old fear of meeting at the next corner some one to whom his son owed money. There was no one expecting him when he came home. The bell never rang now, and he began to miss it.

He would sit for hours at the window, looking over the house-roofs. Far off there was a shining church-tower upon which the sun shone, and it gradually became a kind of friend; and he was glad it was an inanimate thing that could not deceive him.

One day when he went out, he found a bunch of flowers at the door. He took them in to Astrid's room, where the charwoman was not allowed. Everything in it stood as it had stood when she last left it. She had not had time to make the bed, and the pillow still retained a hollow where her head had rested, and the mattress where her body had lain. Some clothes hung upon the wall, and a faded picture of her mother; and a pair of slippers stood by the bed. It still seemed to hold her pres-

ence, and he stood looking from one thing to another until his lips began to tremble.

Sometimes some dish at dinner tasted particularly good. He often thought he heard a whispering in the kitchen as if there were some one youthful in the house; and when the old woman came in, he thought he could see his daughter's smile upon her face.

At last there came a letter from Astrid. His glasses often needed wiping while he read it. A day or two later a large printed card came from General Bang, who had the honour to invite him to dinner on the following Saturday, on the occasion of his son's marriage with Fröken Astrid Riis. He held the card in his thin hands, and he did not laugh scornfully, nor tear it to pieces; he laid it one side.

The reason of his calmness was his inability to do anything more. At night he closed his eyes wishing he were never to wake again. He expected nothing from any one else. He himself was nothing. Life went on, and had enough to do in helping the happy, the strong, the victorious. Now and then some one fell

under the wheels of the triumphal car. What matter if they did?

"So you're to be a bride on Saturday, Astrid? And many of the bridegroom's family will be there, but none from yours. You'll be alone. So you're going to get married now, Astrid?"

Looking towards the window, he went on: "Why do I hate General Bang? He kept me from being promoted. Is that certain? A woman. What's a woman? She's a man's life. And what's a life?" He looked at the distant church-tower and sat on. This perpetual hatred, this long plan of revenge, this hope that had kept him up—what were they really?

The next day he turned over the pages of his manuscript not to correct anything, but from an indefinable desire to look into himself. Once he had heard General Bang say that a regiment ought to be in three battalions; he himself suggested four. The general had also once said that a battery should have four guns; he had put six. Why? He closed his eyes, as if to examine himself, then opened them,

turned over more pages, and closed them again. Why that—and that?

He had not gone to the other and challenged him—that time; he did not thrash him. He mobilised instead—on paper—a whole army. Was it so? He raised thousands of soldiers, divided up brigade-districts, made regiments and batteries, built fortresses here and not there, increased the cavalry, reduced the engineers; it was a life-work. But why? It had been the work of years. Satisfaction? Revenge? The whole Norwegian army was to be reorganised because he himself was unhappy. Does such a thing often happen? Do other men do the same? Each shouts for himself, wants to take the world for his own use; the voice of one is lost in the noise, another obtains a moment or two's hearing, and it is called a victory, it is doing good. What is it?

The captain laid the papers aside and smiled. He was almost sorry for this great work that patiently mirrored his desire for vain glory. He had had a picture of the world in his head. A wheel goes over it one day, and a world is extinguished. What matter? A

grain of corn falls upon a stone and does not germinate; a planet in space is annihilated. What of that?

He rose and paced slowly up and down and looked at his thin hands. It was Thursday, and the day after tomorrow little Astrid was to be a bride. He must answer. He felt it impossible to say yes, and still more to say no. Friday came. "If I were to go tomorrow and give away my daughter, I should humble myself, fall at my enemy's feet. But who am I? One who has done nothing. I cannot pay my debt of honour. Am I any better than a beggar?"

The next morning Captain Riis rose and began to brush up his least faded uniform. He took a scarf and epaulettes too out of a drawer and looked at them. He had once thought of donning his dress uniform once more in his life, and that was on the day when he obtained satisfaction, though how it would all take place had not been quite clear to him. But he had so often recalled what had taken place once when he was serving in a French Regiment. The general called up the happy

man, there was a speech, an order, beating of drums, presenting of arms. It was a recollection, and each one of us has some such indistinct fancy, which is at once a recollection and a hope. Had this moment now arrived?

No, and yet the captain took great trouble in inking over the shiny places on his uniform. It would be the last time he was in full dress. Did he really mean to go to church for little Astrid's sake? To forgive her—or the other? Had he then, who was nothing, owned nothing but debts, and whom no one noticed—had he anything to give away?

He put on his uniform; his boots shone. He looked at himself in the glass. He was well shaved, but his eyes were perhaps redder and his cheeks hollower than they had been. His hair was white. He put on his epaulets and scarf; but as he was about to buckle on his sword, he dropped into a chair and sat lost in thought.

To forgive! It was like going to one's own funeral. To give his hand to the general. To go to his home. To look as if nothing were the matter. He had not answered the invita-

tion, but now he was going to confess his weakness. The other would smile and triumph. This was his satisfaction; this was how it was to end. He rose with difficulty and buckled on his sword. He was ready. When the time came for him to go, he put his hand to his collar which seemed to strangle him. Then he went to the door, where he stood for a moment looking back at the rooms where he had suffered much, but where hatred and a dream had kept him up. It was over now, and he was on his way to throw himself under the wheels of the other's chariot; he was on his way to forgive. He was effacing himself. Present arms!

XVI

PAUL TANGEN had come to town to be Reidar's best man, and set out in good time for Bygdö, to fetch the bridegroom. After crossing the ferry, he tramped through the yellow woods along the bay, looking across to the town with its wavy masses of houses in the pale autumn sunshine. The season was beginning in there, and he would have to stay for years in the country to work and save. It was enough to make one weep.

He found Reidar walking up and down his dining-room in full dress. "Help yourself to a cigar and sit down," he said and went on with his walk. Through a window the sun spread a square patch of light on the floor, and now he crossed this patch of light, now went into the shadow beyond it. He put his hand up to his pale, freckled face to feel if he was properly shaved, and then passed it over his short, red hair, pulled down his cuffs over his strong-

looking hands, threw back his shoulders, and continued his walk.

"You look as if you were going up for an examination," said Tangen, seating himself in a comfortable chair with a cigar.

"Do I look so serious?" said Reidar, trying to laugh. Tangen continued: "On such a great day as this, I think you might run to a white waistcoat." Reidar stopped short and looked at him, wondering how he could think of anything so unimportant now.

"I suppose you've been dressed since first thing this morning, and have been having a private settlement with Providence." Reidar looked at him and smiled, and then went on walking a little more slowly than before. "And now you've got to appear before the church, my friend. To tell the truth, I didn't know you were confirmed. Wasn't it then you had a row with your father?" Reidar shook his head. "You gave in that time then?" Reidar nodded. "Then it was when you went to America without any one knowing?" Reidar smiled. "And then shot an Irishman at Klondyke a quarter of a minute before his

knife could reach you." Reidar passed his hand over his forehead and stopped. "Why do you mention that now?" "I'm taking your measure," said Tangen. "I'd rather not be your enemy." Reidar made an impatient gesture and began walking up and down again. But suddenly he took a chair, and went and sat down in front of the other. "Now, Paul Tangen, answer me a question." Reidar was evidently a little embarrassed. "Now honestly, do you never feel sorry to have no religion?" "Yes, perhaps." "We human beings are in reality so defenceless." "Yes, we are." "And yet at the same time there's no good in churches and priests." "Why, you're going to church today!"

Reidar got up and again began his restless walk. "There's music and a vaulted roof, at any rate. But don't you think our descendants will have temples that answer a little better to the universal spirit? I'm dreading to hear the priest speak to Astrid about God and sin in the same breath. Sin! As if the Lord of light and the universe hadn't something better to do!" "Ah," said Tangen, "you ought

to have had me as your priest. I would have preached about something different." Reidar suddenly thawed, and they both had a good laugh. "Now I must really have a cigar too," he said, as if to shake the whole subject off.

At the same time Astrid was sitting in her room, holding in her hands a bouquet. Reidar's last present to her in their engagement days. She was to take it to church with her, so it would also be his first in their married life. She had been sitting there for several hours looking at it with a far-away look in her eyes. Of late Astrid had gone through so many emotional experiences that she scarcely felt them now. She seemed to turn to them and try to smile. It hurt her a little not having heard yet from her father. The general refused to take any notice of this, and was giving a large party this evening, he was so bent on going his own way. Ah well, she would get over it! And there was something worse, something terrible. Ever since she had fled to Reidar she had had a feeling that her happiness would not continue. It would soon come to an end. And now she knew what it was. That strange

evening on the fjord—what had happened then—it could not be hidden, and it was the same thing as that she could not live. It was an abyss to look down into, but she tried to smile. She would like to have lived with Reidar, but to come to him she had had to deceive her father. There was a great price to pay for happiness. She had grown up in a dark house where she had longed for sunshine and youth; but to get them she always had to tell untruths and deceive; sunshine was so dear! It must have been the same with her mother. Had not the fate of that dead mother enticed her farther and farther, and at last dragged her with her? Well, there was no help for it now.

“Dear Reidar, so we are to be married to-day.” She knew in her own mind that that time on the fjord—it was only a dream about Reidar. She closed her eyes and called him to her. It was his neck round which she threw her arms. It was to him she gave her soul. The dream about Reidar was beautiful—the other was death. Astrid raised the flow-

ers to her face for a moment, then let them fall again with the same far-away look.

"Now, child, we must make haste," said Fru Bang, coming in with the dressmaker. Her dress was produced from a cardboard box. It was white silk embroidered with gold, so light and airy that she looked as if she were clothed in light. Then Inga came in, dressed in pale yellow silk, and with white flowers in her hair. She also had a little box, out of which she now took the green myrtle wreath. For a moment the two friends stood looking at one another. Inga smiled as if she were asking forgiveness for something, and at last she said: "Do you object to my putting this on for you, Astrid?" "No," said Astrid. "Who else do you think I should wish to do it?" So Inga took up the wreath, and fastened it to Astrid's golden hair, and the two girls kissed one another.

Fru Bang fastened upon Astrid's breast a tiny gold watch set with diamonds. "It is from Reidar," she said, and then took from her own arm a bracelet of lava, and placed it upon the bride's, saying: "That is from me, or perhaps today you would like it to be from

your mother." Astrid threw her arms about her neck.

The next moment the door opened and the old grandmother entered, dressed in black silk, and with her stick. She put up her veil, and after looking at Astrid for a little while, exclaimed, "Ah, Reidar knows how to choose!" A ruby cross was hanging on a gold chain round her neck, and this she now took off and fastened round the bride's neck, saying as she did so: "Take my blessing with it, my child. My grandmother, my mother and myself all wore it as brides. May you also one day put it round your grandchild's neck." And she kissed the bride on both cheeks. Astrid tried to thank her, and then looked at herself in the glass with all this finery on, and smiled as before.

A wedding such as this gathers a number of spectators, and there was already a large crowd round Frogner Church. Carriages drove up, and the wedding-guests got out and went into the church. There was a stir when a particularly bridal-looking carriage and pair drove up, but it contained two gentlemen, the

bridegroom and the best man. The two tall men raised their hats.

As Reidar walked up the church, he looked about him as if he had never been in a church before. There were onlookers in the pews, and up in the choir sat relatives and friends, who nodded to him; but he bent his head and made no response. It was all so solemn in this silence and the light from the coloured windows. He recalled the emotions he had felt during the summer. Today they were to be sung out in hymns and borne up by the organ. The old clerk, in a black skull-cap, showed them to a bench opposite which was another which he knew was for the bride.

“Who’s that old officer down there?” whispered Tangen. They both looked down the dimly-lighted church. An old, white-haired officer had just come in and taken up a position behind a pillar, as if he did not want to be seen. He looked at the two men, and his eyes looked keen and red. The bridegroom shook his head. He did not know him.

But the bride would soon be here, and it seemed to Reidar that something wonderful

must happen then. The great nave seemed breathless, people sat motionless, and the clerk put on his spectacles and began to turn over the leaves of his hymn-book. What now?

Suddenly the organ burst out, and the vaulted roof was filled with its tones. The whole congregation rose, and at the door at the bottom of the church appeared the general with his gold epaulets and orders, holding in one hand his plumed hat, and by his side something white—the bride.

Reidar never forgot that moment. A wave of emotion passed over him, and he felt as if he must get hold of something to cling to. That white figure was supernatural. She did not seem to walk; she floated. His father, who was leading her, now looked so splendid that he felt he ought never to have opposed him. At that moment the church was more than a place of beautiful music, and a good old man who was there and looked kindly at them both was the far-off, universal spirit. And he felt himself so unworthy, so humble, that he involuntarily bowed his head and whis-

pered to himself: "If I have sinned much, O God, forgive me!"

General Bang was seventy, but he walked lightly and easily, as if he himself were the bridegroom; and upon his cheerful face was a look as if something from long ago had once more become young and living.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon the white-haired captain, and he gazed curiously at him. The captain had risen behind his pillar, and was looking at the two. The general started, but noticing that the bride had fortunately seen nothing, he led her to her place opposite the bridegroom, took his sword in his hand, and sat down beside her.

Astrid looked across at Reidar and smiled, but for a moment he felt unable to smile back. Then she looked about the church, as if seeking some of her own people, but finding none she again smiled at Reidar, and raised her bouquet to her face.

The ceremony did not take long. The priest was by no means a young man, but every time he had to address the bride, he seemed to lose the thread and had to pull himself together.

It was too bad that she should smile like that when she looked at him. When the pair knelt and she gave her hand to Reidar, she did not look at him, but at the coloured light from the window, as if she were being wedded to it.

As the general walked with his wife after the bridal pair down the church, he looked anxiously for the old officer behind the pillar. He was afraid of a scene if the bride discovered him. But the stranger was gone, and the general felt relieved. While the organ poured forth its tones, the couple passed out of the church; but there the bride suddenly stopped and clung to Reidar. The couples following down the aisle came to a standstill. What was it? People got on to the benches to see better; others tried to force their way out.

Astrid had caught sight of her father, and for a moment almost took him for a ghost. Her eyes opened wide, and she felt as if she should faint; she wanted to call for help, and could scarcely stand. Her father approached, and she saw his hair was white, but he had made himself as smart as he could. His face was almost unrecognisable, but he smiled and

saluted. He did it to her. He meant no harm; and the next moment the bride had rushed to him and thrown her arms about his neck, crying: "Father! Father!"

The organ still went on playing in the church, but the crowd could get no farther. Only those outside saw the old officer take the bride in his arms. For a moment it looked as if he were going to carry her away. The bridegroom gazed at the stranger, but knowing who it was, did not interfere.

"I forgive you!" whispered Captain Riis, smiling at his daughter. "There now! Try to stand up! How fine you are today! I only came to congratulate you." And he smiled with the tears running down his cheeks.

The bride could stand again now, and she turned to Reidar, but at this moment the general pressed forward, and clasped Captain Riis by the hand, saying in a voice loud enough for all to hear: "Dear old friend, how nice of you to come after all! Are you better now? Now let's be getting on!" The old captain stood erect and saluted the general, after which he allowed himself to be led away. The

whole incident had only occupied a minute; the carriages drove up, and the general arranged so that he and the captain should drive together alone. And there they sat side by side, rolling along after the bridal carriage. The captain smiled and spoke respectfully, and was then lost beside the other. They were of the same age, they had been school-fellows; and now one of them sat there, healthy and strong, magnificent in plumes, gold epaulets and orders, while the other was worn and white-haired, with dark ink-spots on his breast where orders might have hung. But the happy man has his shadow, and at this moment it was evident that General Bang had his.

All the windows in the pretty house on Drammens Road were lighted up that evening, and a number of people gathered outside, to see what was going on. A window was open, and they could hear speeches, and afterwards music and dancing.

Captain Riis had the general's wife on his right at dinner, and the bride on his left. Everything seemed swimming in a golden mist. There were flowers and champagne and

his daughter a bride, and his enemy proposing his health. It was something like satisfaction! In the dance that followed, he led out Fru Bang to dance, and then his daughter. It was long since he had danced, and it was quite strange. Afterwards he had to rest. He saw the general dancing with Astrid, and a memory suddenly darted into his mind of something similar having happened once before. He could see now how like Astrid was to her mother. But be calm—all is past!

He had only drunk one glass of champagne, but the day had been too much for him; his head sank back against the sofa-back, and then he knew he was being helped into a room with a soft bed, in which it was pleasant to sleep.

Under a tree in the shadow beyond the zone of light that fell from the windows of the house on to the street stood a bench on which sat a man with his hat drawn down over his eyes. He knew that hours were passing, and that it was late; but he still sat on with his eyes upon the house. He was waiting for something. Some people seek a certain pain as others seek

pleasure; and this man wanted to see the bride drive away with another man.

At last a motor-car came up, and he recognised it. It stopped outside the house and waited, and in a little while two figures came out. He rose and gazed at them. He recognised Reidar; and the other, who was wrapped in a dark shawl with something white below it, must be she. They got in; he could see the white at the window; the horn sounded and they glided away. He stood looking after them until their light was lost in the darkness, and then with bent head he began to walk briskly without noticing where he went.

It was over. Jörgen Holth had a feeling as of having had a tooth drawn, and now it was to be hoped things would go on better again. A wave had taken him and lifted him high up into the light and then dropped him head foremost into darkness; and now he was once more on land. It was all over, and at last he found himself upon the familiar road from the school to his dull home. "Life is strange," he thought, when he found himself on his way home. He recalled how last win-

ter he had begun to lose all feeling both for ideas and people, and how youth had come, the visit of a sunbeam, the kiss of a fairy; and he had waked, clung to the fairy and deceived his wife and children; he became young, felt hope spring up within him, and began literary composition again. And his worn, untidy wife began to smile; his kisses that were warm with thoughts of another made her faded cheek glow. She began to keep the house cleaner, managed to dress better, and grew young again under his false warmth; she read papers and books so as to have something to talk with him about; she woke up more and more, as if her youth had only been asleep. Once he thought it was horrible, and would have liked to tell her to leave off, but it was different when he was crushed. Then it was not so easy to reject her tenderness, and they were strange days that followed. He was angry and scolded about everything, and she only smiled and was always in a good temper. He walked up and down at night and said he was tired and could see no way of getting on; and she sat up with him, trying to encourage

him, and forcing herself to look at things in a bright light only to calm him. He could not scold her; he had to kiss her—out of pity. She became a heroine under these kisses, and it ended with his clinging to her, not because he hungered for youth, but because he felt a desire to thank, to expiate, to ask forgiveness.

The evil days began to fade into the background; and nothing brought such rest to his mind as closing his eyes at night with his wife's hand in his.

He had been now to bid a last farewell to the past. Youth belonged to youth. It had to be borne, and he would harden himself by seeing them go away together, and try to be strong from that day.

It was done now. His wife could not know where he was so late, but she waited for him. She was waiting for a good-night kiss, waiting for the hand from his bed, and for the certainty that he slept.

Holth unlocked the street door. There was a close smell on the stairs, but he said to himself that some day it would be better. He entered the hall, and knew that the air there

was as fresh as Selma could possibly make it. He thought of his books that perhaps would never be finished. There was no help for that; it was something to work for his wife and children, and duty was something too. And he was not old yet; he might still have time for a good deal.

And he had a memory in his heart that was wonderful and that would never die.

"Is that you, Jörgen?" said a voice as he entered the bedroom.

XVII

THE only being who could bend General Bang's will was Inga. She begged, she sat on his knee and caressed him, she sulked, she wept, and at last she threatened; and when it was all of no avail she took to her bed. It ended in her getting her way in what Henrik and she considered a point of honour. They were allowed to be married by the magistrate quite quietly, with only her parents and two witnesses present. Afterwards they went and ate their wedding dinner alone in their own little home, taking turns in waiting upon one another.

There followed some wonderful days, when they went out together to buy the things for dinner, when he carried the parcels home, and she boiled and fried, and he helped her to wash up. He had saved a couple of hundred kronas, and even if it meant starving and living on a penny a day, they were both agreed that the

money had to last until he got a house to build.

Henrik always thought that the general and all the family considered him quite unworthy of the young girl, and he supposed they were only waiting now until they had to help them. Well, they might wait! Inga was wholly on his side, and meant to do without a servant and do everything herself, even if it went on for years.

Now when they went out together, they no longer discussed the rebuilding of the various blocks, for they had long ago decided what the town was to look like. They went about to discover the cheapest greengrocer, the most reasonable butcher; they discussed the question as to whether fish were not more nourishing than meat, and whether carrots were not better than anything else. They were agreed that people ate too much, and were determined to show that one could be healthy and happy with little.

The tall, pale man, and the slender, dark girl went about arm in arm, apparently blind to the fact that people lived round about them.

She was still the well-dressed daughter of a general, and carried herself well as if she were only for show. No one was to see that her back was often a little stiff with scrubbing floors, and her hands both red and swollen. The parcels that they carried home were a little lighter each day. Everything in the little three-roomed flat, with its view, over house-tops, of the fjord, was spotlessly clean and tidy, the chairs and sofa were in a new style created by the master himself, the tablecloths and curtains had been woven by Inga in their engagement-days, and in the outer room a large table strewn with drawings, in case any one should come. They were always waiting for some one to ring and come in and order a house; but they had agreed to say to the first that came that unfortunately Henrik was overloaded with work, and would have a difficulty in undertaking anything more.

He wrote an article on how much cheaper it is to build pretty houses than ugly ones, and it was really printed in a paper. He expected an answer from some one, but when none came he wrote one himself under another

name, so that he could appear once more under his own. The thing was to get one's self known a little. Afterwards they waited trembling for steps on the stair and the ringing of the bell. He had submitted to the town corporation plans for a handsome block of work-people's flats, and to private companies plans for a villa-suburb. He waited for their answers and he got them; but they were "No," and in the evening they went to sleep in one another's arms, she in tears, and he with compressed lips. The bell did ring, but it was their relations come to see them. There were steps on the stairs, but they were only messengers with bills. Things began to look dark, but they rose every morning with renewed hope, and accustomed themselves to do without coffee at breakfast and after dinner, and never thought of having a sweet to dinner. Inga toiled and washed and scoured heroically, and shed a few tears in secret, but laughed and kept up her husband's courage when they were together.

One day he was standing, sleeves turned

up, helping Inga to iron his collars, when the bell rang.

“Hurry up!” said Inga. “That *is* somebody, for mother never comes so early.”

Henrik dried his hands, turned down his sleeves and put on his coat, and went rather anxiously to open the door. Inga could hear it was a man who came in. Henrik was a long time in the next room, and it sounded as if a discussion were going on. She tiptoed to the door and listened with beating heart, but could catch nothing. At last the stranger left, and Henrik rushed in, crying: “Where are you?” He ran to her, took her in his arms and carried her round the room. “Don’t be so silly!” cried Inga. “But tell me what it was.” “You’re my little wife, and the prettiest in the world, and I’m your husband, and it’s all just splendid!” “No, no, don’t! You can kiss me afterwards! Tell me what it is!” “An Englishman, a Cræsus, who wants a large house in Asker.” “Oh dear! I suppose you didn’t say no?” “I really couldn’t! Was it wrong of me?” “Why of course not! Now we must have a dinner to celebrate it.” “Yes,

and today I've still got time to help you. Come along! I'll stand treat for beer." "And I for a pudding." "And I for coffee." "And I for a cigar." And they danced about the room, kissing one another, delighted, radiant with youth.

There are often beautiful days in October, too, days when the scarlet rowan trees and yellow aspens lift their dying colours against a background of blue fjord and green fir-woods. Out at Astrid and Reidar's it was very peaceful now that the relations left them to themselves. In the twilight, when he came home from the office, they went along the shore together, and looked at the water and the red-brown hills above Baekkelaget, at the ships coming in, and at the strip of red sky far out.

They had once agreed to have a wedding-trip to England, where Reidar had business to transact; but Astrid said she would rather wait, and the journey was put off.

It seemed as if he did not know her so well now; she seemed to be slipping out of his

hands, moving away into regions where he could not follow her, avoided his caresses, and yet was more tender, more devoted, and prettier than she had ever been.

The housekeeper, who had dreaded being dismissed when the young mistress came, was still allowed to manage the house. Astrid was late in rising, and ate her food without noticing what it consisted of, and then wandered from room to room and looked at all the beautiful things with the same distant smile. Was she not only a guest here? She would soon have to go away.

She went to see her father in the little backyard flat, and thought it darker than ever; she went into the little kitchen, and was touched at the sight of the big copper kettle and the few utensils. The captain was kind, but he walked about as if he could not settle anywhere.

One day Reidar prepared a surprise for her. He came driving out with her father, and after them came a little load of furniture. The old man was to live in his daughter's house, and was given a pretty room on the

first floor. Astrid put her arms round her husband's neck and said he was too kind.

"Perhaps it'll make you laugh a little oftener, will it?" he asked.

"Yes, perhaps." •

So Captain Riis was installed in a beautiful house, where he had to dress better, and where he could manage to pay off his debts; and he could smoke as many pipes as he liked. He could at last go for a walk in broad daylight without fear of meeting a creditor, and he no longer smarted with vexation, hatred and plans for revenge that kept him awake at night. And yet it was strange to get up and begin a day. He had nothing to hope for. He was comfortable; but had been forced into it, as it were; he had not won it for himself, it was not what he had merited. There were times when he sat with bowed head and a feeling of shame.

Once the general suddenly entered the room, and the captain involuntarily rose to salute. The general put his hands on his shoulders and pressed him into a chair, called him "dear friend," and overflowed with kind-

ness. The captain tried to be natural in return, but was only respectful. This mortal enemy, who had done him so much harm, but who had always lived in the sunshine, so dazzled him when at close quarters that he felt exceedingly small. The captain liked best to be alone in his room, when he tried to withdraw into himself; but after all it was only to find painful memories, the ruins of a hatred and a hope, and besides, nothing. At last he took to reading, the first book being General Marbot's *Reminiscences*. This was quite in his line, and his own youthful dreams lived again. He had once hoped himself to gain victories and pass through vanquished towns. Now he read of Napoleon and his generals, and lost himself in the brilliant life for which he had himself been intended; and the world around him was blotted out entirely.

In a happy moment, Reidar proposed that he should begin to ride. It was a great day when, in uniform, he mounted the beautiful horse and trotted through the wood. He was a little stiff at first, but that went off; and now he had his war-reading and riding, and

the one supplemented the other. Every time he mounted, he had a feeling of having risen after all, that he was a staff-officer and was setting off for the manœuvres. He discovered strategic points in the country around, and began to imagine the battles of which he read being fought before his eyes. If now Kutusov had drawn up the Russian army differently at Austerlitz, in such a way, for instance. Another day he led Napoleon's left wing at Jena, and swords flashed and cannon thundered. It sometimes became so real to him that he would point with his hand as if giving commands to an aide-de-camp; and sometimes he would suddenly put the horse into a gallop to hasten to the aid of some hard-pressed regiment.

People walking about Bygdö began to get accustomed to this solitary rider, white-haired and in a faded uniform, who talked to himself, and would suddenly gallop up on to a hill to arrange something or other. The October wind blew clouds of yellow leaves across the fields, and the horseman stood out against

the sky, motionless, with outstretched hand, a living monument in the wind.

Astrid was anxious every time she saw him ride away, but Reidar assured her that the horse was steady, and that there was no danger.

One moonlight evening, when the trees along the bay sparkled with frost, the newly-married couple were walking along the shore stopping every now and then to look at the lights of the harbour and town. Astrid went down to the water, stooped and put her finger in.

"I hope you're not thinking of bathing?" said Reidar.

"It's not really cold," she said, smiling and coming back. He took her arm and drew her on. "I remember," he said, "the first time I saw you. You weren't so pretty then as you are now."

"And I remember when I saw you in the air on *skis*," she said, turning towards him. "Always afterwards, when I was in the dark kitchen at home, and thought of sun and blue sky, it was of you I thought."

"Perhaps you'd like to go up there for a little now. We can take a maid and live there quite quietly."

She turned and looked towards the distant hills in the moonlight, as if her thoughts had flown there where they had met that Easter, and were going through it all again. Then she shook her head. "No, Reidar, not now. You mustn't mind, but I can't now."

"I can't think what's the matter with you, Astrid. You used to be so well and happy, and could never do too much, and now you don't care about anything. It must be my fault. I often wonder how I can change myself so as to be what you like."

"But, dear, you can't mean that! It's I who am impossible. But you must bear with me a little longer." And she clung to him, full of tenderness, a soft warmth, without fire.

What was he to do? At table she would fix her eyes upon him, far-away yet piercing, as if she wanted to imprint his image upon her memory. She never laughed; she smiled. Her hands were now white and pretty, and

they often stroked his hair, or they were folded about his neck or his arm. It was delightful, but it was not enough. He proposed teaching her to ride, taking a trip to Paris, going to the theatre, or for a motor-car ride, but it was always No; she would rather be at home and sit still and look at him without speaking. The only thing that roused her was accounts of his travels, of shooting expeditions, of exciting sails and races. She would lie on the sofa with closed eyes, her hands clasped behind her head, smiling and saying every now and then: "Go on! It's lovely!" Once she said: "Have you ever shot an eagle?"

"Yes, once."

"Did it cry when it was struck up in the air?"

"I shot it with a bullet. I didn't hear whether it made any sound. But it scratched me badly on the hand. There's the mark still."

She took his hand and kissed the white scar left by the bird's claws, then lay back on the cushion and looked up at the ceiling.

“There are people who believe that after death one can be what one likes,” she said presently. “A bird, for instance. Suppose they were right?”

“Well, what then?”

“I was thinking of mother. If she could choose, perhaps she would be sailing about somewhere or other in the clouds like an eagle.”

Reidar was walking up and down the room in the lamplight. He looked at her askance and did not know what to answer. She was once more in regions to which he was a stranger.

When Astrid was alone at home, she would say to herself: “All this about mother can only be a morbid fancy.” But then she would shake her head. Years before she had begun to say her evening prayers to the dead mother whom she missed, and the mother had become like a living being to her, a voice within her to comfort her and guide her. She knew now that it had been her mother who wanted her to go to the mountains at Easter, who encouraged her to love Reidar; and the more there

was that bound her to the dead mother, the greater desire did she feel to share her fate. It was going to happen now. She had lived as her mother had lived; she must die for the same reason, and she supposed in the same way. There was no help for that. And the nearer the time came, the more she felt herself one with the dead. She recalled one little thing after another, and involuntarily began to do the same. She sat at the window one day, looking at the sun, and she remembered that her mother had prayed to it when other people were going to church; and she folded her own hands. She hunted up the old flute, and would sit playing it for a long time in the quiet house. She remembered her mother's last sail, and Reidar's boat on the beach became a friend to whom she often went. There were times, indeed, when she was no longer certain whether her mother and she were not the same person.

Then one day Fru Bang came with an elderly man whom she introduced as a friend, Dr. Falk. Astrid suspected a plot, and dared not look him in the face, although he was kind and

only spoke on matters of general interest; but when they were gone, she remained sitting lost in thought, with her usual smile. There was no putting it off any longer. When Reidar came home, she looked closely at him, but noticed nothing unusual. She was glad, and that evening she promised to go with him to the mountains, to Paris, wherever he liked. She was well now. He seemed delighted, but now and then looked curiously at her when she was not looking.

That night she slept upon his shoulder. She listened to the beating of a heart that seemed strong enough to beat for ever; and now and then she passed her hand softly over his hair.

In the morning, when he bent over her as usual in bed to say good-bye before going to the office, she held his face before her for a long time, as if she were trying to take in his features and remember them.

“Good-bye, dear!”

“Good-bye, Astrid! I’ll telephone from the office some time during the morning.”

His steps died away, and she lay listening to them until they ceased.

It was a grey autumn day, with gusts of wind darkening the surface of the water; and when Astrid, later in the morning, asked the man to get the boat ready, he hesitated and proposed going with her.

"No," said Astrid. "I'm going to fetch my husband; and you know I'm a sailor."

The man, an elderly, grey-bearded man, did at last as she desired, but kept looking up at the grey bank of cloud in the north.

At last she was in the boat, the sails filled, and she sped across the bay. Astrid was well wrapped up and held the rudder, while the wind ruffled her hair. She looked back smiling to the shore, where the man stood watching her. He could see now. Gusts of wind took the sails, but it was too early yet, and she stood out over the fjord. A large steamer came towards her, but she would pass that. The gulls cried and sailed on the wind. She remembered the little kitchen with the smells from the back yard. Now she drew deep breaths of the fresh sea-wind, and felt her face

glow with the salt spray. She looked at the sky with its grey, rolling clouds, where storm and sunshine would always follow one another, and beyond lay hills and mountains already white with snow. Easter, youth, a man in the air on *skis*!

Suddenly she started. High up there was a grey streak in the clouds. It was a solitary eagle. Did it see her?

Later that morning Reidar was standing in his office dictating a letter, and strolled to the window for a moment to consider. He looked across the open square towards the cavalry barracks, and noticed a troop of soldiers in white jackets just turning into the square on their steaming horses. Then he heard the tramp of hoofs and the calls of the men.

"Telephone!" said a voice behind him. He went and put the apparatus to his ear. It was the housekeeper's voice.

"What? What?" And a little later: "Your mistress? When?"

The voice still went on, and suddenly he turned pale. The hand holding the apparatus

trembled, but he kept it to his ear and went on listening. "Send the car!" he said at last and rang off.

He would not make a display of his emotion before his clerks, and therefore forced himself to continue the dictation of his letter. The motor-car must soon be there. But its horn had not sounded when he had finished, so he began to dictate another letter. Once more he had a feeling of something invisible that wanted to force him on to his knees, but he would try to stand.

At last the horn sounded, and he took up his hat and hurried down. A few questions put to the chauffeur were enough. He got in and pressed his hat down upon his forehead; and the yellow car started, turned the corner, and sped more and more quickly through the town.

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